

THE OBSTACLES OR GAPS WITHIN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCHES
TOWARD GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

A THESIS-PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
BLANCHE E. MURPHY
MAY 2018

To my husband, William, my everlasting love.
To my son, LaVon, daughter-in-law, Wanda and all my siblings.
Thank you.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
2. Theology of Grieving	47
3. Literature Review	93
4. Project Design	112
5. Project Outcomes	147
APPENDIX	
A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT	156
B. GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP SURVEY TO PARTICIPANTS	158
C. GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP SURVEY TO CHURCHES	159
BIBLIOGRAPHY	160
VITA	165

ILLUSTRATIONS

Tables

1. Hebrew Words for Grief.....	63
2. Grief Words for Grief.....	64
3. Question 1 - Comparison between Male and Female	115
4. Question 2 - Comparison between Male and Female.....	115
5. Question 3 - Comparison between Male and Female.....	116
6. Question 4 - Comparison between Male and Female.....	116
7. Questions 5 & 6 - Data Results from Respondents.....	117
8. Data Survey Results from Churches	121

Figures

1. Questions 1 & 2	122
2. Church Membership	122

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All praises go to God for the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to complete the Doctor of Ministry program and especially the perseverance to complete this Thesis-Project. Because of God's amazing Grace and His Everlasting Mercies, both were paramount in sustaining me in some of my darkest moments during this process. I am grateful for the guidance and comfort from the Holy Spirit.

To my son, Lavon and my daughter-in-law, Wanda. I am thankful for their faith in me to finish this entire program and the prayers for my endurance. To my siblings, Katie, Mary, Margaret, Fannie, Gladys, Lois, Evelyn, and Garland for the encouraging words, prayers and confidence in me to reach my goal.

I am grateful for the contributions to the development of this Thesis-Project from friends, church members and associates.

I am eternally grateful for the friendship, patience, and time that was extended to me by Carrie "Bunchie" Gay. I could not have completed this Thesis-Project without her guidance and insight.

ABSTRACT

Since death and dying are inevitable, it seems there would be an apparent and constant need for grief support ministries in churches. Such groups are not always available and even when available not well attended. This thesis-project will involve research on the obstacles or gaps in African-American churches toward support groups, especially grief support group. While this may be a universal problem, this research will focus on small and mid-size African-American churches in the Southside of Richmond, VA. Three methods of research will be utilized to examine some possible reasons for the lack of interest in participating in such groups.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis-project, the theory that there are obstacles or gaps within African-American churches toward support group ministries, especially grief support ministries, will be explored. I would like to find out what some of those obstacles or gaps are and the reasons for them. Seemingly, in small and mid-sized churches there are very few active support ministries, especially grief ministries. In addition, where support ministries were organized in churches they disbanded shortly after being organized for lack of participation by members who had experienced the loss of their loved ones. In this researcher's faith community, New Canaan Worship Center, the organizing and disbanding of grief support ministries groups has been evident. Some of these grief support ministries, dates they were organized, membership and length of survival are discussed later in this chapter.¹

This thesis is written from the perspective that every loss should be grieved. Every moment of sadness is valid.² Every person who has suffered from a loss should have available support while they are on the road to healing. While that support is usually from family and friends, other grieving persons may not have that family support. Therefore, the faith community should have support ministries available for grieving persons and their families. The realization is that some persons want to be left

¹ See "Part One - The Problem and Its Setting."

² R. Neil Siler, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey: Caring for the African-American Soul* (Mechanicsville, VA: New Life Publishing, 2012), 122.

alone while grieving but there are some persons who desire and even need the support that a grief support ministry could offer.

Since an exact reason or reasons for the gaps in African-American churches toward support ministries have never been identified,³ this thesis-project will explore several reasons that may contribute to the lack of interest in participating in organized grief support ministries. I will also examine the reasons why small and mid-sized churches in the Southside of Richmond, VA, do not have grief support ministries.

From the research conducted, this thesis-project will focus on what may be some blockages that could prevent African Americans from reaching out for much needed help after suffering a loss. This help could be essential to a person's mental wellbeing, especially after the loss of a loved one.

Part One - The Problem and Its Setting

There are obstacles or gaps in African-American churches toward loss support ministries, especially grief support ministries. Those obstacles are more obvious in small and mid-sized churches where there are fewer members compared to the megachurches with larger membership. While this problem may be a more global phenomenon, I am limiting my research to small and mid-sized churches in the Southside of Richmond, VA. Typically, in those churches there are no support ministries, especially grief ministries. In the churches that have put forth the effort to organize

³ See Part One, "The Problem and Its Setting," for support groups organized in New Canaan Worship Center.

support ministries, they eventually disband after a short period of time for lack of participation, interest, and support.

Some of the support ministries that have been organized in New Canaan since 2009 but have not survived are listed below. As an ordained licensed minister and the elder that has been assigned by the pastors to be the leader over the Support Ministry, I am seeking answers for the lack of interest in the grief ministry which is one of the ministries under the Support Ministry leadership, along with Christian education, healing care, and wellness ministries. As a chaplain and certified caregiver, I have a deep passion for wholeness and wellness for hurting persons.

In 2009, we started Celebrate Recovery, a support ministry for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. This ministry had a structured program where once a week, everyone gathered for corporate worship before separating into small groups. There were six groups of females with at least eight to ten participants and two male groups that had approximately six participants in each group. Each session was facilitated by two trained persons and lasted one hour and thirty minutes with structured lesson plans that included questions for discussions centered on the lesson. Each lesson was structured to aid in the continued healing and wholeness of each participant. This ministry survived for approximately four months. However, after approximately two months many participants had stopped attending the groups.

In 2011, Formational Healing Care support group ministry was organized and introduced to the congregation. This structured group consisted of a trained certified caregiver who had gone through intensive training. Even though there was a certified

caregiver facilitating the group, members of the group were informed that the caregiver did not have the power to heal, that all healing comes from the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the Formational Healing Care support group helped participants to heal by positioning them in the presence of the Holy Spirit, allowing the Holy Spirit to heal deep wounds that usually result in dysfunctional behaviors. These sixteen weeks of small groups met each week for two hours. Before members met at the decided upon time, the room was prepared with soft worship music, an altar that had sacred items on it that included crosses, candles, anointing oil and holy water, also an icon that was important to the caregiver. The structure of the group would usually consist of four to six participants and each session began with prayer and praise reports. The Formational Healing Prayer ministry was organized by Dr. Terry Wardle out of his brokenness. The goal of this ministry was to position people for a transforming encounter with Christ in the places of their deepest pain and greatest dysfunction.⁴

This ministry helps persons that have become “stuck” in life situations that have resulted from dysfunctional behaviors because of some deep wounds that sometimes have been buried for so long that only the Holy Spirit can heal. The members in the group will be taught how to go to a “safe place” where the Lord will meet them, and the person can experience the empowering grace of Jesus. Each structured experiential is geared toward the healing that people can obtain when they are opened to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

⁴ R. Neal Siler, *How I Got Over: Healing for the African American Soul* (Mechanicsville, VA: New Life Publishing, 2010), 97.

The first year, several months after organizing, there were four groups with at least six participants meeting each week. After that sixteen weeks ended, it was several months before another group of five participants chose to attend. One year later, two groups of four persons completed the sixteen weeks. However, only two persons were members of New Canaan Worship Center. The remaining persons were recommended by another church. In March 2017, another group with four members went through the sixteen weeks of healing care sessions, with one person from New Canaan Worship Center.

In 2013, the Stephen Ministry, a support ministry for grief and loss, was organized at New Canaan Worship Center. This researcher and another minister attended an intense week of training in Missouri and were certified as Stephen Leaders. When this support grief ministry was introduced to the congregation and presented to each ministry, there were only two persons interested in the ministry. This was a support ministry that never had any participation from members of the church that eventually disbanded after several months of announcements, advertising, and videos.

In 2016, Grief Recovery Support ministry was organized and presented to the congregation. This ministry helps grievers who struggle with unresolved grief issues and focuses on recovery from the emotional pain caused by death, divorce, and other losses. Three persons went to training, however, in order to be certified to facilitate small groups and conduct one-on-one counseling, each trained person had to lead a small group. Each group could consist of up to eight people. To get enough members for small groups, these trained facilitators solicited help from members of the congregation

in order to complete the requirements for certification. As with the other organized grief ministries, when the Grief Recovery ministry was introduced to the congregation, no one attended. The facilitators offered different times and different days, trying to accommodate the members of the church. The facilitators offered one-on-one counseling, without appointments, just walk-in days two evenings a week, but there was no participation. Eventually the ministry phased out.

Reflecting on the above information, as a caregiver, minister, and a chaplain, I wanted to research some of the reasons why African- Americans did not participate in support groups.

There are three problems that often occur when African-American churches do not have grief support ministries. First, one obvious problem is grieving persons are left without the support that they desperately need during this painful time. For this thesis-project, I am defining grief as deep sorrow and emotional suffering felt particularly when “someone or something has died to which a bond or affection was formed.”⁵ Additional information on grief and its effects will be explained later in this thesis-project.⁶ Grief can be expressed in a wide range of emotions. Losses occur in many areas of a person’s life but according to Dr. Kenneth C. Haugh, the greatest feeling of loss is from the death of a loved one.⁷ This researcher has experienced many losses in life but

⁵ “Grief,” *Wikipedia*, accessed March 8, 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/grief.

⁶ See “The Nature of Grief” below.

⁷ Kenneth C. Haugh, *A Time to Grieve: Journeying Through Grief Book 1* (St Louis, MO: Stephen Ministries, 2004), 3.

none as devastating as the death of my husband, mother, and brother, as well as other family members and friends. Even though I've suffered other losses—experiencing the “empty nest” syndrome when my son left home to go to college and the loss of a job—the grief I experienced over those losses could not compare to the loss from the death of a loved one. Death can traumatize, take the breath out of the griever, and cause all kinds of emotions. Death and dying are unavoidable and there is an inevitable need for support during this loss.

In addition, the absence of loss support ministries in churches leaves people to endure the pains and struggles of grief. Some feel isolated and alone. This absence results in grievers journeying through the healing process by themselves which could make the journey more difficult. While there are no cures for the loss of a loved one, having a compassionate, caring person to walk alongside the griever can make the journey easier. Therefore, having grief ministries in African-American churches can provide resources that could help in the healing process.

There are some persons who do not have a family structure where they can feel comfortable expressing their emotions. Therefore, without grief ministries in African-American churches grievers would not be afforded a safe haven to express themselves or be among others who are on the road to healing. Some grievers would not have encouragement or positive affirmations without grief ministries but instead they would encounter well-meaning but useless clichés. Hearing clichés such as, “God took your loved one because He needed another flower in heaven,” or “Now you have an angel to watch over you” only escalate the sorrow and add to the pain of grieving. Sometimes

when the grief is so overwhelming, and tears begin to flow, the grieving person will encounter such remarks as, “You’ve grieved long enough, it’s time to move on,” or “You need to keep on living.”

The lack of grief support ministries in African-American churches denies grieving persons the opportunity to develop friendships with those who understand. Those persons can empathize with the feelings, pains, and struggles associated with the loss of loved ones. Grief ministries can afford grievers the freedom to express openly the many emotions associated with grief without having to encounter judgment or condemnation from those who have not suffered the loss of loved ones.

Second, there appears to be a problem in African-American churches of losing the sense of community among the members of the congregation. This loss of “family” results from more emphasis being placed on programs and events. There appears to be less emphasis placed on holistic healing of hurting persons. Death of a loved one is acknowledged from the pulpit, but nothing is being done to help the griever on the road to recovery and healing after the funeral. Often, the grieving person is left to find solace outside of their faith community. Where there are support ministries, the participation is so low that the support ministry eventually disbands. Reasons for lack of interest is never researched or evaluated to determine why there is disinterest.

Third, the problem with obstacles or gaps within grief ministries results from the culture of African- Americans and their “story.” For African- Americans, story is an

important ingredient in their healing metaphor.⁸ Most of these stories have been told from generation to generation and began during slavery of African Americans. The theory is that much of the lack of participation in grief ministries originates from a steadfast mindset toward healing without help—surviving through the struggles of grief depending on their own strength.⁹ The past can have wonderful memories but those memories and stories that were generated from slavery resulted in some blockages for embracing the future. Some of these blockages will be discussed later under “African-American Churches - The Disconnect with Grief Support Ministries” below.

Part Two - Research Questions

This research addresses three questions in reference to disconnects, problems, or gaps with African Americans toward loss support ministries in their churches. This study is needed for a better understanding and its effects on griever, the support needed, the culture of community with African-American churches, and some of the disconnects with grief support ministries in African-American churches. The following research questions will be examined:

1. Is there a need for grief support ministries and what benefits would be gained from these ministries?

⁸ Siler, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for my Journey*, 185.

⁹ Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace, *African-American Grief* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 185.

2. What is the church's role in organizing and maintaining grief support ministries?
3. How does the African-American culture affect interest and participation in grief support ministries?

The framework for this study is based on the following components:

1. The nature of grief.
2. The need and the benefits of grief support.
3. The culture of community in African-American churches.
4. The disconnect with grief support ministries in African-American churches.

Part Three - Thesis

I contend that every loss should be grieved. Every person who has suffered a loss should have support, especially from their faith community. All persons who are journeying through a grief period in their lives should be able to have someone to walk alongside with them. There is a need for grief support ministries in African-American churches.

The Nature of Grief

“Grief is a strong, sometimes overwhelming emotion,”¹⁰ especially for people who have experienced the loss of anything or anyone they loved, and that loss has left a void in their lives. It can be expressed in a wide range of feelings such as anger, guilt, emptiness, fear, and failure. Grief is the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior.¹¹ Of course, grief is not always about death, but it is always about attachment and separation. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and Donald Kessler state, “Grief is an intense emotional response to the pain of a loss. It is the reflection of a connection that has been broken. Most important, grief is an emotional, spiritual and psychological journey to healing.”¹²

We can grieve the loss of anything, anywhere, or anyone to whom we have become attached. However, grief is not limited to death but includes such life experiences as loss of health, loss of employment, radical changes in appearances, children leaving home, divorce, separation in relationships, and other things that cause a void in a person’s life. Sandra Giddens says, “Loss is an experience that you love and grow with. Some losses are positive like moving to a new home and feeling a loss over leaving the old home or graduation from high school or college. Other losses are difficult

¹⁰ Mayo Clinic, “What is Grief?”, accessed March 8, 2018, www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitorguide/support-groups/what-is-grief.

¹¹ John James and Russell Friedman, *Grief Recovery: Moving Beyond Death, Divorce and Other Losses* (New York, NY: Harpers Collins Publishers, 2009), 3.

¹² Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving* (New York, NY: Scribner, Inc., 2005), 207.

to live with such as severed relationships, separations, and divorce.”¹³ Every loss should be grieved, and every loss is unique to each person. Losses occur in many areas of a person’s life. There is no specific time or place when a loss may occur.

According to Kenneth C. Haugh, while there are many types of losses, one of the greatest of these is the passing of a loved one.¹⁴ Love is a powerful force and its loss can leave an enormous void that impacts every aspect of a person’s being. Losing loved ones usually produces intense grief that can manifest as anxiety, depression, worry, lethargy, and a myriad of other symptoms.¹⁵ Sometimes death happens when least expected to people who we don’t expect death to happen to. Because a sudden death is unexpected, the initial shock and disbelief is often greater and lasts longer.¹⁶ Death has no set time, date, or place according to human standards. Death is inevitable. Death always has been and always will be with us. Dying is an integral part of life.¹⁷ Death cannot be delayed, canceled, or responded to with a command of “not yet.” According to Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, “Death strikes indiscriminately- it cares not at all for the status or position of the ones it chooses.”¹⁸ Death can traumatize, take the breath out of the

¹³ Sandra Giddens, *Coping with Grieving and Loss* (New York, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2000), 5.

¹⁴ Haugh, *A Time to Grieve*, 3.

¹⁵ Kenneth C. Haugh, *Experiencing Grief: Journeying Through Grief Book Two* (St. Louis, Missouri: Stephen Ministries, 2004), 14 -16.

¹⁶ Haugh, *A Time to Grieve*, 18.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death: The Final Stage of Growth* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 6.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Death*, 5.

griever, and cause all kinds of emotional reactions. When unexpected deaths occur, it can be more grievous and may require more care.

There are many losses, and many feelings associated with those losses, that results in grieving. There are many types of grief that many persons are probably not familiar with and may or may not have experienced. The types of grief are: anticipatory, abbreviated, absent, collective, complicated, cumulative, disenfranchised, inhibited, masked, normal (uncomplicated), prolonged, and traumatic.¹⁹

For the purpose of this thesis-project, only three of the types will be discussed. The three types of griefs are anticipatory grief, uncomplicated grief and complicated grief. Since there are no rules on how to grieve, each person will deal with grief in many different ways that sometimes can depend on the circumstances (e.g., sudden death, long illness, death of a young child) as well as past experiences of loss.

Anticipatory grief is grief that occurs before death (or another great loss) in contrast to grief after death. Anticipatory grief is a reaction to a death that persons can anticipate such as when an individual die from a long-term illness. This type of grief includes many losses, such as the loss of a companion, changing roles in the family, fear of financial changes, and the loss of dreams of what could be. Grief before death often

¹⁹ Eleanor Haley, "Types of Grief: Yes, there's more than one," WYG, last modified July 26, 2013, accessed March 8, 2018, [whatsyourgrief.com/types-of-grief/](https://www.whatsyourgrief.com/types-of-grief/).

involves more anger, more loss of emotional control, and can be related to the difficult place-the “in between place” people find themselves in when a loved one is dying.²⁰

Uncomplicated grief, sometimes referred to as normal grief, is marked by movement towards acceptance of the loss and gradual alleviation of the symptoms of grief, as well as the ability to continue to engage in basic daily activities.²¹ Most people coping with uncomplicated grief will adjust to the loss and return to normal life, even when crying feelings of sadness. They do not need medication or counseling to manage their grief. However, the person should be supported as they go through the grief process. Some of the experiences associated with uncomplicated grief are symptoms of depression or anxiety, a sense of loss, feeling disconnected, wordiness, mood swings, sometimes guilt, waves of sadness or anger, and seeking reminders of persons who have died.²²

Complicated grief is a general term for describing when a person adjusts poorly to a loss.²³ Complicated grief refers to the reactions and feelings of loss that are debilitating, long lasting, and/or impair a person’s ability to engage in daily activities.²⁴

²⁰ Lynn Eldridge, MD, “Anticipatory Grief Symptoms and Purpose,” *Very Well Health*, last updated March 06, 2018, accessed March 08, 2018, [verywell.com/understanding-anticipatory-grief-and-symptoms-248855](https://www.verywell.com/understanding-anticipatory-grief-and-symptoms-248855)

²¹ Haley, “Types of Grief.”

²² Angela Morrow, RN, “Grief and Mourning: What’s Normal and What’s Not?” *Very Well Health*, updated April 14, 2017, accessed March 8, 2018, [verywell.com/grief-and-mourning-process-1132545](https://www.verywell.com/grief-and-mourning-process-1132545).

²³ Morrow, RN, “Grief and Mourning.”

²⁴ Haley, “Types of Grief.”

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross is well known for her writings on the stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). According to Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, everyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one will go through these stages. However, Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has stated that these stages may not be sequential. There may be times when one stage comes later in the process for one person than for another and the various stages may even be repeated or prolonged.²⁵ According to Sandra Giddens, research has shown that these stages are coping mechanisms for some grievers.²⁶

When Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced her book *On Death and Dying* in 1969, her studies were centered around terminally ill patients. It was much later in her career that she believed that her studies could be applied to those grieving. The theory was that the stages are a part of the framework that helps people learn to live without what they had lost.²⁷ She contends that in grief, just like death, there is a transformation for the loss. If you do not take the time to grieve, you cannot find a future in which loss is remembered and honored without pain.²⁸

²⁵ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York, NY: Scribner, Inc., 1969), 37-109.

²⁶ Giddens, *Coping with Grieving and Loss*, 1.

²⁷ The Kübler-Ross Model, last modified 2015, accessed March 8, 2018, hdsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/13080.pdf.

²⁸ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving* (New York, NY: Scribner, Inc., 2005), 297.

However, there are some criticisms about this five-stage model of grief because of the lack of research and evidence supporting the stages as described by Dr. Kübler-Ross. While Dr. Kübler-Ross's contributions brought heightened awareness about the process of dying, her work has been accompanied by some unfortunate collateral damage. Many people, professionals and the general public alike, have attempted to apply her stages to the emotions that arise after a loss. Grieving persons will try to fit themselves into a defined category if one is offered to them, especially if the offer is from persons in power and authority positions such as therapists, clergy persons, or doctors. There are no reactions so universal that all, or even most, people will experience them. There is only one unalterable truth: all relationships are unique.²⁹

Moreover, this model is a product of a particular culture at a particular time and might not be applicable to people of other cultures. These points have been made by many experts in this field such as professor Robert J. Kastenbaum (1932 -2013) who was a recognized expert in gerontology, aging, and death, as well as the editor of academic journals in this area (International Journal of Aging and Omega; Journal of Death and Dying) and the founder of the first university-based educational and research center on death and dying (Wayne State University, 1961). He authored several relevant books: *The Psychology of Death* (1972) and *Death, Society and Human Experience* (1977).³⁰

²⁹ James and Friedman, *Grief Recovery*, 12, 14, 15.

³⁰ "Kübler-Ross Model," *Wikipedia*, accessed March 8, 2018, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Kübler-Ross-model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model).

John W. James and Russell Friedman stated on the five stages of grief identified by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross,

Grief is difficult enough without added complication. Many people are familiar with the pioneering work of Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who identified five emotional stages of death and dying. Grief, which follows death, divorce, and other losses, should not be regarded in terms of stages. The nature and intensity of feelings caused by a loss relate to the individuality and uniqueness of the relationship. There are no absolutes in grief.³¹

The concept of death may never be fully understood by all humanity. This is evident by such questions that are often asked, 'Why did my love one have to die?' or 'Why do good people die so young'? Death and dying are inevitable and because this is so, there is a need for loss or grief support ministries. As previously stated, this researcher's theory is that every loss should be grieved. All grief-stricken persons should have access to an available support system in their faith community as they journey on the path to healing.

Grief Support - The Need and Benefits

There are many types of support groups that are organized where people with the same issues can come together to help in providing and evaluating relevant information, relating personal experiences, listening to and accepting other's experiences, providing sympathetic understanding and may establish social networks for communicating with each member. They may develop coping strategies to feel more empowered and share burdensome problems or circumstances. There are many types

³¹ James and Friedman, *Grief Recovery*, 11, 15.

of support groups that are organized for any disease, organization, self-help, or profession. These groups may also work with the public or engage in advocacy to support causes not pertaining to the group.³² These groups may have a structured agenda that includes lectures or teaching along with open discussions. There are some weaknesses in support groups that may include power struggles, constant disruptions, aggressive behaviors, and weaker voices not heard or their opinions not valued.

Grief ministry is a type of support group organized to help persons who have suffered the loss of a loved one to overcome or go beyond their grief.³³ Grief support ministries are faith-based ministries that are organized with the goal of helping grieving persons travel through the grief process with support, care, compassion, and community. These ministries usually open with prayer and scripture and offer a non-judgmental, safe environment. Privacy is important and needed, therefore the group sessions usually take place at a church with an agreed upon time and day to meet. Usually, the grief support ministry has a trained facilitator who directs the discussion, allowing each participant to have a voice in sharing their feelings when they are comfortable doing so. The group may address topics such as the challenges of grief, relationships, what is normal in grieving, and dealing with special events.³⁴ Julie

³² "Support Group," *Wikipedia*, accessed March 8, 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Support_group.

³³ "Support Group."

³⁴ Chris Raymond, "Grief Loss and Bereavement Support Groups," *Very Well Health*, last modified September 17, 2015, accessed March 8, 2018, [verywell.com/grief-loss-bereavement-supportgroups-1132533](https://www.verywell.com/grief-loss-bereavement-supportgroups-1132533).

Yarborough, grief group leader for the “Beyond the Broken Heart” grief ministry, states, “the sessions I facilitates include topical references from the Bible, DVD’s on grief, and group discussions for asking questions and talking about unfamiliar emotions”.³⁵ The group offers flexibility for creating a time structure that will work for the group, whether they meet at the church, another community location, or a member’s home. The group explores many of the spiritual and practical issues of grief and considers specific coping strategies. This group meets for eight sessions with the option of continuing the group beyond that.³⁶

Even though grief support group ministries are organized to help grieving persons, there may be some weaknesses involved with these ministries. Some potential pitfalls may include comments perceived as negative that could cause discouragement, disappointments, and feelings of alienation. Sometimes understanding the emotions of people and giving support may be overwhelming. Sometimes bad advice could be given from facilitators and other members. There could be someone trying to “fix” other grievers. Even though there are potential pitfalls of grief support groups, nevertheless the advantages outweigh the possible pitfalls.

Grief is normal and a natural reaction to loss of any kind.³⁷ Everyone grieves differently, and everyone’s grief is unique to that person. Grief is always about

³⁵ Julie Yarborough, “Leading Grief Ministries,” *Ministry Matters*, last modified May 16, 2012, accessed March 8, 2018, www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2818/leading-grief-ministries.

³⁶ Yarborough, “Leading Grief Ministries”.

³⁷ James and Friedman, *Grief Recovery*, 5.

attachment and separation. We can grieve the loss of anything, anywhere, or anyone to whom we have become attached to deal with the sorrow. We may need confidants, counselors, or support groups that can assist those who have suffered losses. The journey is difficult, and the griever may experience many obstacles along the pathway to healing.

This researcher contends that while a person is going through these stages support and help should be available for the griever to use. Although many who grieve may not be aware of the stages of grief that Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross describes, they will realize that the loss of a loved one has affected their entire being—physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social. When the loss occurs there is shock, not only physically but mentally as well. The pain may be so intense that the griever’s mind is overwhelmed with many different emotions. Emotions such as being dazed, confused, disoriented, or bewildered might surface.³⁸ During this time of grieving, nothing can heal the pain of the loss, but having a grief support ministry available to attend can be helpful and may give the griever a sense of comfort.

Given this, would grief support ministries would be beneficial in African-American churches? A definitive answer would be “yes,” grief groups can be very helpful. Not only are grief groups helpful, but according to therapist Sevin Philips, “Grief groups are so necessary because they are the one place where everyone will

³⁸ Haugh, *A Time to Grieve*, 7.

understand what you are going through and be willing to listen to you.”³⁹ Kenneth C. Haugh, who had suffered the loss of his wife, commented on the importance of support as persons grieve. He stated, “God never intended for us to suffer alone. He created us to care for and support others in their time of need, and to allow others to care for and support us in ours. This is being *interdependent*, which is God’s original plan, rather than *independent*, which can be a very lonely way to grieve.”⁴⁰ Regardless of whether a person utilizes grief ministries or not, it is essential that those ministries be available in African-American churches. The advantages, as well as the weaknesses, for attending grief support groups are in the following pages of this section on grief support.

Grief support ministries can provide supportive individuals who will listen as the griever talks or cries instead of dismissing them and their grief with well-meaning but useless clichés. Those in these ministries would hopefully understand that sometimes presence is often all that is needed for support. Sometimes offering a hug when needed or holding a hand in silence can offer much comfort.

Grief support ministries can provide a safe haven for grievers to express themselves and be among others who are also on the road to healing. The journey to healing may be difficult and long but could become easier when traveling with others who have suffered the loss of loved ones. There are many advantages of attending a

³⁹ Sevin Philips, *Met life Advice* (San Francisco, CA: Research Publications, Inc. 2005). Vol. 11, Number 10.

⁴⁰ Haugh, *A Time to Grieve*, 13.

grief support group. A trained facilitator of the group would acknowledge and affirm each person's grief. Grief groups can allow persons to be in communication with other persons who have suffered a loss. Grievers may express their emotions and not suppress tears, nor put on a "smiley" face for the sake of appearance but be true to one's self. Freedom to express emotions would be a way for the healing process to begin. Those in the group may understand those emotions since they may be experiencing the same or similar emotions. Grief support ministries will afford grievers the freedom to express openly the emotions associated with their grief. In the group they may not encounter judgment or condemnation from those who have not suffered the loss of loved ones.

In grief groups, it is permissible to express behavior that may be considered weird or strange to outsiders but not weird or strange to those in the group. If a member says he finds peace at the cemetery where their loved one is buried members in the grief group may not think it strange or weird. Or, if someone in the group makes a statement that they continue to smell clothing with their loved one's scent still on it, it likely wouldn't seem weird to someone in the group who may have done the same thing. Since members of the group may have found a measure of peace in doing these or similar things, they likely will empathize with the person who shared their information. It will be helpful to hear that others have the same feelings and experiences after suffering the death of a loved one. A support group can provide emotional and practical support needed for one another.

Everyone in the group could possibly become comfortable with one another. They will be able to provide comfort and encouragement because they understand that grief is worthy of sympathy and attention. Each person will be encouraged to be gentle and kind with themselves as they process their grief. Just the presence and compassion shown from the members in the group can be encouraging and will help more than clichés and meaningless promises. The thoughtful words that are spoken and actions that are shared in the group may continue to provide comfort to the grieving persons long after the group meetings.

Despite diversities of experience, members may feel a deep connection to one another and bond because of their brokenness and pain. They could possibly develop a lasting friendship by leaning on one another because they understand the suffering each other is enduring.

Although nothing can magically take away the pain grieving persons experience, they will find some measure of comfort in talking to others who have also experienced the death of a loved one. As described by Jo-Ann Lautman, founder of OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center in Los Angeles, “When the foundation of your home and your life has been shaken by death, grief groups create a sense of community and help you feel less isolated.”⁴¹

Another benefit of a grief support group is grieving persons will find that they are not the only persons struggling with some of the same issues and problems. They

⁴¹ Norine Dresser and Fred Wasserman, *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love* (New York, NY: Hamilton Printing Co., 2010), 147.

may learn how to handle issues and settle some of the problems that may result from the death of their loved ones. Some of these issues that grievers struggle with include shopping for groceries, cooking for just one person, paying bills, and maintaining households. After the death of a loved one, significant dates such as birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays can all be difficult. Information sharing by members in the group may help to face these dates in a new way while honoring their feelings for their loved ones.

Joining a grief support group can help the grievers sort through the myriad and confused feelings and situations they face after their loved one's death. Learning they are not alone and that others experience the same things that they do can help them have more compassion for themselves.

It is normal for grievers to become self-focused during their time of grieving. Sometimes if this self-centeredness is extended it creates misery and feelings of sadness that are difficult to navigate. There are those who seek relief from that emptiness by engaging in distractions or dysfunctional behaviors such as watching too much television, overindulging in food and alcoholic beverages, and overspending on shopping trips. Grievers become self-absorbed in these habits because of their sadness and loneliness. Joining a grief support group could offer alternative and healthier ways of dealing with those feelings.

Grief support ministry groups could be effective because members could help each other. Helping others interrupt self-absorption is a highly effective way to relieve sadness. The journey in grieving is hard, but the grief group can make grieving bearable.

Since each person in the group is mourning a loss, no one will be alone and can gather strength from each other in the group.

Even though there is no cure for the loss of a loved one, support ministries can be beneficial and help make the journey through the grieving process easier to travel. Within support ministries, relationships can develop, and emotions can be openly expressed without fear of judgment. Information sharing, personal comfort, and assembly support can be offered for each person in the group.

Given the need for grief support ministries and the benefits of it for grievers, congregations should regard it as a part of their ministry to establish and nurture such groups. This is especially true for African-American congregations.

The Culture of Community

This researcher's theory is that the African-American church, as a community, plays a significant role in how African Americans view loss and grief support ministries. I contend that the church has always had an enormous influence in each family's life, even when each member of the household wasn't a member of the church. In my opinion, the church was the focus of many households and a beacon of light that could guide all believers.

I believe that in many small and mid-size churches, emphasis is placed on the church as a "family", where everyone is important, everyone is loved, and everyone will be cared for. Because of this emphasis as a "family", it could generate feelings of belonging in a community. Therefore, because of the culture of community for African-

Americans, they depend on that unity and strength through struggles from the “family” in the church without the help of organized loss or grief ministries.

For African- Americans, the church as a community represents refuge, solace, and healing. This is a place to come to in order to be made whole. It is a place where each person should feel acceptance and belonging. It is a place where each person shares in each other’s joys and shares each other’s sorrows. When one member hurts, all members hurt. When one member rejoices, all members rejoice. According to Dr. R. Neal Siler,

The church is the place of co-humanity, where you are encouraged to have hope because of what God is doing and because of who you are as God’s child. And, convergence of this community in the life of the majority of African Americans is found most identifiably in one’s church. The church had always been the connecting link. African-American lives centered around the church even though each had their own families. It was the gathering together of all families that gave support to and assisted each other in coping with the rigor of life.⁴²

Historically, the African-American church consisted of a shepherd (pastor) and the congregation who were passionate about the Word of God and each other. Dr. Siler comments on this issue by stating,

The way the church embraced its members, how it took a stand against injustice and wrong, were hallmarks of its caring and desire to touch the lives of its members in meaningful ways. However, there are those who believe the black church has lost that quality of caring. Its relevance and authenticity as a healing community has been compromised by its assimilation and integration efforts to look like mainstream churches, it does not touch the brokenness of the people.⁴³

⁴² Siler, *How I Got Over*, 160.

⁴³ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 160.

The majority of African-American churches seemingly have lost that community feel. Today, the common pattern in our congregations is that we pray, sing songs of praise, listen to the preached word, collect tithes and offerings, pray the benediction, and leave. Most people don't even know the names of the persons sitting beside them in the pews. Thus, there appears to be a disconnect and lack of community even before a loss occurs. In other words, the congregation has suffered a loss of community even before there has been a particular loss of a loved one by a member of the congregation.

One may speculate that this has occurred because the church has succumbed to the temptation of culture. Some of the young adults would prefer to socialize in secular clubs, perfect the latest dances, and keep up with the latest fads in clothing in order to be accepted by peers who may not attend worship services themselves. I have observed in my faith community that the adult women outnumber the adult men in the church by two to one. In general conversations, some men have admitted that there are times when "other things get in the way" of coming to church. Some of the reasons varies but includes: choosing to work overtime, choosing to wash cars, or choosing to participate in some recreational activity that does not involve the church. Surely, if a favorite sporting event or team is playing, it often takes precedence over the church. Additionally, community is not fostered as it once was in the church. Intentionally, the church used to offer fellowship events outside the church such as dinners, riverboat cruises, bowling and a day in the park with family and friends, many of these simply do not happen anymore.

Then there are some members in the church who appear to be competing for material gain and striving to maintain a certain economic status, at times even over other members. Regardless of the age group, members in the church are striving to be self-sufficient, to “stand on their own two feet,” and not depend on anyone. This independence can be attributed to not only the general American “spirit of independence” but to the African-American culture itself. The sense of community is lost when it is obvious that more emphasis is placed on increasing finances and instituting initiatives to increase membership and less emphasis on the wholeness and healing of the members of the church.

But it has not always been this way. With the apostolic church and countless church teachers, African- Americans have traditionally defined the church as “a hospital” where the sick go for healing of the mind, soul, and spirit. Since grieving persons are sick after suffering from the trauma of losing a loved one, it would seem that the church would be a place where they could expect to find healing. The sickness can be most noticeable in physical appearances and sometimes through mental lapses and memory losses, such as forgetting keys, forgetting the last page read, forgetting why they went to the grocery store, and forgetting the intended exit off the freeway.

But what about the soul and spirit which are not so noticeable? How will the church be a healing place or a hospital for the suffering? Soul care can be a holistic approach to helping others find healing and restoration. Unfortunately, too often, after the funeral and after the “clichés,” the grieving person is left to struggle alone.

The church community has the power and responsibility to ensure that this need does not go unmet. Despite what doesn't happen in terms of grief support, there is within the African-American church a tradition which could be such a viable and vital resource in grief support and healing ministries. That tradition is the story or narrative and the encouragement to "give one's testimony."

For African- Americans, story is an important ingredient in the healing metaphor. One's "testimony" is a snapshot of one's story. In African-American life, this testimony is a powerful invitation to the community of faith to connect with each other's story because in many ways, each story is their story.

One's story is about survival and revival. I am not on this journey by myself. Since traveling alongside one another is an important aspect of grief ministry, the African-American tradition of sharing one's testimony could offer a valuable model for use in grief support groups. The church can be one of creating and nurturing community by having a grief support ministry. Certainly, grief support ministries are not a "cure-all" for the pain of losing a loved one. Such grief groups would facilitate community as individuals connect with others who have suffered loss and could utilize story or testimony as an instrument to facilitate healing.

According to Sandra Giddens, "Grief is not a problem to be solved, but it is a process to be lived."⁴⁴ Norine Dresser and Fred Wasserman agree,

...that there is not a prescribed path or exact recipe for the grief journey. Each person will mourn in his own unique way as each person grieves the death of

⁴⁴ Giddens, *Grieving and Loss*, 5.

his loved one. While we have heard that time heals all wounds, with grief time alone is not enough. It is what you do with the time that counts. A person should find ways to express his thoughts and feelings, trusting that the pain will ease.⁴⁵

African-American Churches – The Obstacles with Grief Ministries

This thesis-project argues that the African-American culture and the struggles and hardships they endured during the slavery era and which continues today accounts for disconnects, gaps, and attitudes toward grief support ministries. I contend that the testimonies and the stories of African-American ancestors which were passed down from generation to generation are reminders of how to contend with sorrow, loss, death, and dying. However, there are several other reasons that may contribute to the obstacles or gaps with grief support ministries in the African-American church. Just as grief is unique to each person and each person grieves differently, reasons for not connecting or participating in support groups varies.

God and Spirituality

African- Americans believed and relied heavily on their spirituality because of their trust in God. And while some may not have identified themselves as Christians, nevertheless, they had selective trust because of what has been passed down from generation to generation on this “unseen” person who is trustworthy. Religion, scripture, and the African-American church were important to make meaning out of the

⁴⁵ Dresser and Wasserman, *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love*, 150.

death of a loved one. Religious beliefs provided important ways of thinking about and coping with death and dying.

For African- Americans, trust in God helped them find meaning and comfort after the death of a loved one. The way to deal with death was to simply and completely trust that God had good reasons for allowing their loved one to die. They trusted that God had a plan and purpose for everything that happened in their lives. Others found comfort in trusting that God would take care of the person who died, and that God would take care of them in their grief.

This study revealed that most African- Americans believe God does give mercy and grace to all people, especially to those who are grieving a loss. This researcher believes when death and dying occurs, sometimes the answer to “why” is a mystery. But I believe that even in troubles, struggles and grief, God is still loving, kind, and merciful by sustaining, providing and strengthening. In all my pain, I believed that during my grief He was present with me. As I traveled through the process of grief, He was in the process. And after I traveled through and the grief lessened, He went through with me. The God of the scripture is a living, personal God who is present and at work in my life to lead the way, set free, forgive, and help.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See the interview with Participant One on her trust after tragic death of her son (page 124 below).

According to Dr. Siler, “It was this kind of mindset that caused blacks to draw on the only strength they had left—determination and spirituality. While withholding their emotional selves from one another, they knew that God would hear their prayers.”⁴⁷

Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace further added,

To some people, trusting God means that they do not question God but accept what happened, though in their not questioning there may be an awareness of the questions they could ask. Trusting in God can mean that person does not feel alone, that even though the death means they lost a spouse, a parent, or some other relative, they will not be alone because God will be with them.⁴⁸

Not all African-Americans trusted God and depended on their spirituality. There were those who angrily challenged God because they felt He was unjust in letting their loved one die. Seemingly, they doubted God and failed to believe in God’s wisdom and fairness. During this period of grieving many found it difficult to rely on their faith and trust in God for healing and wholeness.

Trust and Confidentiality

There are obstacles or gaps in small and mid-sized African-American churches with loss groups. Sometimes the obstacles may be perceived as coming from the top— *the pastors*. While the pastors may care for the griever, the concern for the institution seems to be more important. Sometimes not enough emphasis has been put on the recovery

⁴⁷ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 111.

⁴⁸ Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace, *African-American Grief* (New York, N.Y: Rutledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 120.

from a loss. Research revealed from one of the persons interviewed that trust and confidentiality were major factors in that person not attending grief support groups.⁴⁹

Loss has not stopped. Death and dying still affect families in African-American churches. Persons are still grieving. They are often journeying through the process of healing alone without support from the church. However, in all fairness, research has revealed that there are some small and mid-sized churches in the Southside of Richmond, VA, which have started, organized, and even invested in training for facilitators of grief groups.⁵⁰

One such church was the researcher's faith community, New Canaan Worship Center. Several support groups over the last five years were organized but the participation was very low. At least two of the ministries had no participation at all, despite the announcements advertising the startup of the ministries and their purposes.⁵¹

New Canaan Worship Center was organized by Louis R. Blakey, Sr. with twelve members who had branched off from another church where Rev. Blakey Sr. was the Assistant Pastor. He held worship service in a room in a small office building. After approximately one year, the church acquired a church building and the ministry began to grow. This researcher and her family united with the church 1982, where she

⁴⁹ See the interview conducted with Participant Two on page 127 below.

⁵⁰ See Chapter Four for additional information gathered from churches in the Southside of Richmond, VA on grief support groups.

⁵¹ See pages 3-6 above for details on these support groups at New Canaan Worship Center.

has remained until the present. Eventually, as the membership grew, the congregation acquired an old movie theater that had been vacant for several years which required massive repairs. We moved into that location at 4712 Forest Hill Avenue in Richmond, VA, in either the year 1996 or 1997. Rev. Blakey retired and his twins, Lois Blakey-Paige and Louis R. Blakey, Jr., were installed as pastors of the church. They pastor together, rotating preaching assignments each month. They share in the decision-making concerning the church. Presently, there are 176 members on the membership roll. According to the church secretary, approximately 130 are active members. The ministerial staff are comprised of Pastor Emeritus, two pastors, four elders, three associate ministers and one minister-in-training who will be licensed this year, 2018.

The Ministry Model for New Canaan Worship Center has nine major Leadership Ministries with other ministries assigned to these ministries. The ministries are: Worship, Discipleship/Leadership, Missions/Outreach, Community, Support, Care, Marketplace, Children and Youth, and Administration. This researcher is an ordained, licensed elder who is the leader over the Community, Support, and Care Ministries. Some of my other responsibilities include the Christian Education Ministry where I teach, as well as schedule and train others to teach/facilitate in the Christian Education ministry. I am a certified caregiver for the Formational Healing Care Ministry, as well as a certified leader/caregiver in the Stephen Ministry. My degree in Chaplaincy is helpful in my other duties in support and community. Other ministries assigned to me are Grief and Bereavement, Support, and Healing Care Ministries. I preach and complete any assignments given to me by the pastors.

The support groups at New Canaan Worship Center usually disbanded because of lack of participation. Investigation either by surveys, interviews, or questionnaires was never conducted to determine the potential reasons why members decided not to join these groups. Analysis of some of the causes for non-participation in grief ministries revealed that issues of trust and confidentiality were paramount for some persons.⁵² In small and mid-sized churches, where most members know each other, this presented a dilemma for some people.

Dr. Siler poses the question, “Why is it difficult for blacks to open up, to share the places of pain in their life that can lead to greater pain of depression?”⁵³ In answering this question, Dr. Siler believes the answer lies in the core belief held by many African Americans. He states,

It is forged out of a history of oppression and many experiences of betrayal. Beginning with the slave trade a history of oppression was set in motion in this country that created fear and suspicion causing African Americans to suppress their feelings and emotions. It was much easier to act in a way that “Master” found acceptable. So doing reduced the possibility of abuse, beatings, and even being sold.⁵⁴

Although grief is universal—a critical life experience—we often journey through it privately, isolated, and afraid to share our feelings, worried that our expressions may be misunderstood or dismissed. According to Norine Dresser and Fred Wasserman,

Although it is universal and affects everyone, talking about death is generally taboo in American society. Consequently, you probably keep your thoughts

⁵² See interview with Participant Two, specifically page 127.

⁵³ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 110.

⁵⁴ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 110.

about grief a secret. Even as you realize that others must have questions, concerns, and fears about death and grieving that you have, you do not raise the topic. Though you may long to share details, anecdotes, and precious memories, you keep your thoughts to yourself.⁵⁵

Research from Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace has shown that “African Americans tend to mistrust the aid offered by agencies and organized help groups because of what they perceive as an impersonal approach to their very personal suffering.”⁵⁶ As a result, African Americans are often even more dependent on family and friends.⁵⁷ Continuing on with this theory, research has discovered that although many programs for trained therapists and support group leaders seem to imply that they provide expertise in working with all who need therapy or group support, we believe that they do not move beyond the rudimentary level in dealing with issues of grief.⁵⁸

Support of African Americans who are grieving should be respectful and knowledgeable. It requires attention to the uniqueness of each individual, situation, and community. Consideration should be given to the spirituality, beliefs, and even the

⁵⁵ Dresser and Wasserman, *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love*, 1.

⁵⁶ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 169.

⁵⁷ Dr. Rev. Arlene Churn, *The End is just the Beginning: Lessons in Grieving for African-Americans* (New York, NY: Harlem Moon Broadway Books, 2003), 41.

⁵⁸ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 169.

economic status of African Americans. Because the grief of African Americans is often entangled with issues of racism and discrimination, support for grieving African-Americans must be sensitive to these issues.

Many programs that deal with issues such as racism, discrimination, and grief in the lives of African Americans could be potentially unhelpful or even hurtful to grieving African-Americans because they stir up old wounds and hurts that were buried but not healed.

Guilt and Strength

Because of the African-American culture, they were taught to be strong, to endure, and to pull themselves up by their own boot straps and continue on. Historically, this was especially commanded and expected of African-American men. In many cases, that is what had to be done since there was no one to turn to for help and support. Similarly, a grieving person might feel forced to limit or control strong grief feelings because of the lack of support and nurture. "Being strong" in grief is then at least partly about feeling alone.⁵⁹

Grieving people of any ethnicity may talk about needing to be strong in dealing with loss and most times are encouraged by others to "be strong." According to Rosenblatt and Wallace, "African Americans who talk about being strong in dealing with death do so more than Euro-Americans do. For African Americans this means, in

⁵⁹ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 126.

general, to grieve privately after the funeral and burial. “Don’t let them see me cry” is being strong while internally the griever is falling apart.⁶⁰

Research reveals that some people who are suffering from the loss of a loved one experience feelings of guilt. Guilt can result from many reasons such as surviving when the loved one has died, thoughts of regret for not having done all that could be done especially when the loved one was sick before death, or just feeling guilty about some argument that happened in the past. Those who grieve in this way feel unworthy of any future happiness and will actually sabotage good things from happening to them.

They may continue with this attitude as a form of punishment. It is a kind of a “safety net” and should they reveal their feelings in a support group they will open themselves up for judgment from others in the group. Few of us will invite others to share in our grief, and we often resent, rebuff, or thwart the efforts of other people to help us in the process of healing.

Expectations

In studying about grief and support groups, I noticed that some individuals have expectations of a time limit as to when the pain would cease, and healing would be complete. They may come or consider coming to a grief group with various expectations. If the group does not meet these expectations, the persons grieving will be disappointed and usually will not return. Dr. Arleen Churn addresses this issue: death

⁶⁰ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 123.

is a part of life. In the African-American culture, we need to know that death and grief are part of the rhythms of life. It's an emotion that must be processed over time, and the road to healing is often a long and lonely one. Many African Americans appear to be delayed in their pursuit of healing and resolution after the death of a loved one because they don't understand that permanent closure is virtually impossible to achieve.⁶¹

African-American Culture

Searching for some reasons why grief groups are not favored by African Americans in churches, the researcher found that which was not so evident. Readily acknowledged and sometimes dismissed was the fact that African-American culture plays a very big part in the attitudes of African Americans toward grief groups.

Grief is an emotion that has to be processed. The process does not have a time limit and can last a long time. The road can be long and lonely. Grieving in the African-American culture is sometimes accompanied by the feeling that no one understands what they are going through. This concept is traced back to slavery time when as Dr. Churn reminds us of the old slave chant that moans, "Nobody knows de troubles I seen, nobody knows."⁶² During slavery times, no professional help, support groups, pastoral counseling, or grief counseling were available. Therefore, slaves had to find relief from scripture as well as looking deep within themselves to find relief from personal sorrow.

⁶¹ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 205.

⁶² Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 6.

African Americans did not come to this country voluntarily. In the 17th century they came in chains on slave ships because of trickery and deceit. They were not known as African Americans but by many derogatory names over the years. They were not free and did not have a voice as slaves. They were under the watchful eyes of their “masters.”

They did not have freedom of conversation even when working in the fields with other slaves from “sun up to sun down.” They learned to suppress their hurts and pains, even with the loss of loved ones. To show or express any emotions openly would possibly result in a lashing, or worse, being sold, separated from family members. It made life easier and tolerable. Dr. Churn comments,

During the years of slavery, “masters” were uncomfortable with and fearful of their slaves’ primitive, mystical traditions and most often forbid their slaves the opportunity for public or private mourning. Blacks did not own land for burial of loved ones and did not have the freedom to perform their tribal ritual for celebrating the dead. Therefore, enslaved Blacks were forced to mourn in a different manner. They became creative in their grieving, to shed tears and moan chants of comfort quietly to themselves and with each other. This attitude for healing the loss of a loved one was carried over into the New World and passed down from generation to generation and has a large impact on not sharing openly concerning their sorrows, pain, anger, and denial of grief.⁶³

However, late at night most slaves found ways to grieve their loss with their community; and their community was their family. This view of death as a communal loss was brought over from Africa and continued in the New World. Research found that even after slavery, when African- Americans found themselves mistreated or

⁶³ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 7.

disrespected, they learned how to mask their “true self”, their thoughts and emotions. Dr. Siler elaborates on this, stating, “As time grew on, this ‘masking’ was not only self - protecting, but a behavior that was designed to keep African- Americans from carrying each other’s pain. Blacks refused to impose their deep pain and anxiety on loved ones because, for the most part, their loved ones were in pain themselves.”⁶⁴

Analysis found that some African- Americans are reluctant to be open in support groups among people they consider “outsiders”. Even though they may attend the same church or live in the same area, there is not a bond, attachment, or relationship with one another. George Reid Andrew elaborates on this issue by stating,

Reluctance to embrace support groups could result from an identity issue. These issues are traced back to the 18th century, the slavery era. Because of the African-American culture and history, there is a link between inclusiveness, privacy, and avoidance that may account for the reluctances of rejecting support groups of any kind that will mean being transparent. I recognized the past experience may affect the mindset of blacks to be transparent to themselves and others. The culture has been exposed so long that this is a form of protection and refuge.⁶⁵

African-American ancestors of American slaves passed down their own cultural practices which are called “African survivals” in areas of food, music, spirituality, and mourning. Clearly, the impact of slavery on African-American family formation is a source of pain and brokenness that many African- Americans rarely connect. But the

⁶⁴ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 110.

⁶⁵ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin American, 1800-2000* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25.

mindset, the protective mechanisms employed for survival, and the effects of this evil reach far and deep into who African Americans are as a people.

African- Americans have found other ways to keep hidden their feelings of hurt and pain. As well as “masking,” they have walls and fences built. Both have two sides. One is to keep safe those things they don’t want others to get too close to, to see or invade their privacy. The other side is to keep invaders out. This was illustrated in a Broadway play and movie called *Fences*, which was directed by African- American Denzel Washington. He and another African- American, Viola Davis, had leading roles in the movie. Rev. Margaret Minnicks’s view explains,

All the characters had symbolic fences. *Fences* in the Broadway Play (1987, 2010) and the movie (2010) meant different things to each person. For Troy (Denzel), the fence was a barrier that kept out things that he could not control, like death and his own passions. For Rose (Viola), the fence was an enclosure that kept her family together. She wanted to keep safe inside and there were some things she wanted to keep out.⁶⁶

Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner addresses this by saying,

African-American women carry the collective pain of history of African Americans. Embedded in the DNA of African-American women are memories of the enslavement of their ancestors, the horror of the Middle Passage, and the atrocities of slavery and Jim Crow. The notion of the collective unconscious suggests that the legacy of survivors of slavery includes an inheritance of the strength and power that helped them survive this tribulation. At the same time, the post-traumatic stress of these experiences is part of the African-American’s culture.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Margaret Minnicks, “The Movie 'Fences' with Denzel Washington and Viola Davis,” *HubPages*, last modified January 19, 2017, accessed March 10, 2018, hubpages.com/entertainment/TheMovie-Fences-with-Denzel-Washington-and-the-Lessons-It-Teaches.

⁶⁷ Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *Women Out of Order* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 68.

While it might seem unrealistic, overall, the African-American culture might be still living in slavery. The concept of being free is not a reality when there is so much racism, decimation, and destruction all around them. Freedom is not a reality when African- Americans are killed on the streets daily. Nor is freedom a reality when there are so many social injustices against African -Americans. This slavery concept contributes to not participating or utilizing support groups. Because of the struggles African- Americans endured, the strength and power that helped them to survive might account heavily for both their resilience and reluctance to participate in grief groups for healing.

Part Four - Overview

Chapter Two - Theological Framework

I defend this thesis-project on obstacles or gaps in the African-American church with loss support ministries by exploring its biblical/theological framework. A theology of loss and theology of support are revealed throughout the Bible, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. To build this framework, scriptures are provided from the Old Testament on loss, pain, and sorrow. The very first loss was reported in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, which is called “The Book of Beginnings.” The loss occurred in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Throughout the Old Testament we can find stories of mourning, devastation, and suffering, but God provides much needed support because of His love for His people.

The framework for this thesis-project will continue with biblical information from the New Testament on loss, grief, and support groups. Through the lens of Scripture, it will be revealed by the organizing of the first support group by Jesus. Excerpts from scripture will explore how the gathering together of believers in fellowship was the start of the church as a community. They met daily to fellowship, to share, and to express their feelings openly without judgment or condemnation because all were on one accord. The end result of death, dying, grief, sorrow, pain, and hurt will all climax as revealed in Revelation 22:21.

Chapter Three - Literature Review

This chapter will review literature from Norine Dresser, Fred Wasserman, and Dr. Arlene Churn. They are all in agreement on the needs and benefits of grief support ministries in the African-American church. Included in this chapter are conversations from authors Dr. Siler, Dr. Churn, Ms. Dresser, and Mr. Wasserman, who all agree that the healing process is long and is traveled easier with someone supportive alongside the griever.

The focus on the African-American culture having an enormous impact on participation in grief support ministries includes conversations from Dr. Siler, Mr. Rosenblatt, Ms. Wallace, and Dr. Churn. They are in agreement that the slavery era accounts for a major portion of the attitudes of African- Americans to seek support when grieving the loss of their loved ones. In addition, according to authors Dr. Siler and Dr. Churn, because of the enslavement of the ancestors of African Americans, other

factors such as trust, spirituality, guilt, and strength are all responsible for obstacles within the African-American church.

Mr. Blassingame, Mr. Raboteau, Mr. Genovese, and Mr. Levine will add to the discussion on the slavery era of African- Americans—how and where the slaves worshipped and what is meant by “The Invisible Institution”. Included in the conversations will be how funerals and burial of their loved ones were conducted.

Chapter Four - Project Design

In order to explore and compile information to unveil possible explanations for the obstacle or gaps in the African-American church for grief support ministries, I will conduct a correlation study on data collected on the African-American slave era. I will review the struggles, the attitudes toward healing from death and dying with information from other journalists on the same subject, especially African-American authors. Comparisons will be analyzed noting the same facts, ideas, and opinions, along with noting the differences from these authors on the same subject.

For this thesis-project, I will collect and analyze qualitative data by developing a questionnaire for church pastors to complete, providing information on having or not having support ministries in their churches. If the surveyed church has loss support ministries, the questionnaire would be beneficial to determine if the ministry was effective. If the grief support ministry was not in the church, the survey will ask for the reasons why this ministry was not deemed necessary.

In addition, face-to-face interviews with members of the researcher's faith community, New Canaan Worship Center, will be conducted for persons who have experienced loss of loved ones. Interviewees will be males and females who are 18 years old and above. This will be a short interview being no longer than 15 minutes. It will address the three questions pertaining to how griever's view grief support ministries, their opinions on the need and benefits of a grief ministry, and their participation in this ministry if organized in the church.

Chapter Five - Outcomes

In this chapter, the results of surveys and interviews will be revealed to show the need for grief support ministries. I will also clarify the theory that the culture of African-Americans has an enormous influence on utilizing grief support groups in the church. The benefits and the effects of grief support groups, when organized, will be ongoing for observation and evaluation used as tools to determine the usefulness of the ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGY OF GRIEVING

There appear to be obstacles or gaps in African-American churches toward grief support groups. Losses occur in many areas of people's lives and every loss should be grieved. Grief is an emotional response to loss and is expressed in a wide range of emotions. Grief is always about attachment and separation. Grief causes pain, suffering, and sorrow. Loss can manifest as anxiety, depression, worry, lethargy, and a myriad of other symptoms.¹

It is reasonable to believe, God's desire for humanity is that His people will be healed from their grief and that they will be whole and well in all areas of their bodies. This assurance of healing was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53:4, "He (Jesus) took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." This promise was fulfilled in the New Testament when Jesus hung on the cross at Cavalry making atonement for man's sin. The story of His crucifixion is told in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.² Those who trust in the Lord and His word believe that God is a very present help in the time of trouble. Psalm 10:14 is assurance that God does see trouble and grief. He takes the concerns, helplessness, sorrows, and pains of His hurting people into His loving, caring hands and comforts their hearts. Prayers become a lifeline that can uphold and guide those who are grieving when it seems nothing else will help. Nevertheless, when

¹ See Chapter One, the section entitled "The Problem and its Setting," for further explanation on grief and grief symptoms.

² Matthew 27, Mark 15, and Luke 23-24.

there are times that loss occurs in people's lives, they may feel as if their world is caving in. However, minute by minute and hour by hour, God is always near and continually sustains those who are suffering. God is an everlasting presence and is always with us; He is the God of Jacob, our fortress (Psalm 46:2, 7).

While grief can leave a person broken-hearted and crushed in spirit, Psalm 34:15 states that the Lord is near and saves those who are grieving, especially when those who are hurting cry out to Him for help. God can take what has been broken and heal or remake the brokenness into something whole and well that can be used for His glory. God's Son, Jesus, was broken at the cross of Calvary for all of mankind's brokenness that was caused by their sinful nature. Jesus took on all transgressions, all iniquities, and all infirmities of the world at the cross. Because of Jesus' sacrifice at the cross, His death, His burial, and His resurrection, atonement is possible for all believers (Hebrew 9:23-28).

Grieving can be so overwhelming and devastating that those who grieve may feel weary and ready to give up. According to Isaiah 40:28, God has promised in His word that if we trust and believe in Him since He is an everlasting God, He will "give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak." This is evident with many in the Bible, however, some of David's losses, suffering, and grief will be discussed.

According to some of the scriptures in the Bible, there were times when David must have felt overwhelmed and devastated about events that had happened in his life. David suffered many losses that he grieved as will be discussed on the following pages. During these sorrowful times, David called on the Lord as illustrated in Psalm 31:9-10, 24, which states, "Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress: my eyes grow weak

with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction; and my bones grow weak. Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord” (NIV).

Psalm 31:9-10, 24 is penned by David, the youngest son of Jesse, the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth. He was born in Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah. David was the second king over Israel and reigned for 40 years. David had many wives and children and was very familiar with grieving over losses that had occurred in his life. This researcher believes that David suffered loss at an early age. He had lost his identity as a valued person in the family of Jesse. He suffered rejection by his oldest brother, Eliab (1 Samuel 17:28-29). Even though it was custom for the youngest to tend the sheep, David must have felt lonely and may have felt alone as most grieving persons do when suffering loss.

There are times when the pain from grieving is so deep that those who are mourning might not remember the promise that God would give strength to the weary. They find themselves crying out and questioning God as David did in Psalm 13 asking, “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” This psalm denotes David’s spiritual despair, internal wrestling, and deep sorrow. Not only did David have these feelings but those who are suffering from the loss of their loved ones have probably experienced these or similar feelings. Inasmuch as David might have questioned the loyalty of God, he continued to put his trust in Him.

According to Psalm 23, David found solace and comfort in God whom he recognized as his shepherd. David was protected physically from enemies and was nourished spiritually and emotionally. David must have realized that God as his shepherd was his support and was always near because there was no one else to help, no one else to cry to, and no one else to call. Also, in Psalm 31:21,22, David praised the Lord for showing His wonderful love to him and for hearing his cry for mercy when David called out to God for help.

Those who believe and trust in the Lord and His promise that He would never leave nor forsake them may have wondered in times of difficulty and suffering, “Oh Lord, where are you?” Those who are grieving may have feelings that the Lord has abandoned them and forgotten them. They believe He has removed His favor, grace, and mercy from them as they traveled through the healing process.

But like David, when those who mourn put their trust in the Lord who is their light amid their grief, it will result in hearts rejoicing from deliverance from the dark and gloomy places of despair and sorrow. This will allow grievors to be free to sing praises to the Lord for their deliverance and healing (Psalm 13:5-6). The ears of the Lord are always attentive to the cries of His children and His eyes are always on the righteous (Psalm 34:15).

In the years to follow, losses continued in David’s life. He grieved the loss of a favorable relationship with Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul wanted to and tried several times to kill David out of resentment and jealousy. David avoided death and was forced to run for his life escaping to the enemy territory of the Philistines. Saul continued to

pursue David forcing him to move to different cities: Nob, Keilah, Gath, Gibeah, and Ziklag. As the pursuit continued, David hid in the Cave of Adullam. He stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph and the hill of Hakilah.³ Saul's intentions to kill David lasted until Saul took his own life.⁴

Loss and death are inevitable. They do not have a specific time to occur, and can happen anytime, anyplace, and anywhere. Therefore, loss continued for David as he mourned the impending death of his son by Bathsheba. David's child was very sick and was expected to die. David pled with God for his child to live but to no avail. David fasted, wept, and spent the nights lying on the ground. He refused to get up from the ground, refused to eat, and in spite of the coaxing from his household, the child died after seven days.⁵

As David's life continued, he again suffered from the loss of his eldest son, Amnon. He was killed by Absalom, another one of David's sons. Amnon fell in love with his half-sister, Tamar, and developed a scheme to get her alone in his house so he could take advantage of her. After the rape of Tamar, Amnon rejected her and she went to live with her brother, Absalom. Two years later, Absalom found an opportunity to avenge the rape of his sister, Tamar, by killing Amnon. On learning that

³ 1 Samuel 19-26.

⁴ 1 Samuel 31:4.

⁵ 2 Samuel 2:12; 15-17.

his son, Amnon, was killed, David went into mourning, tore his clothes, laid on the ground, and wept.⁶

In mourning the death of loved ones in the Old Testament, feelings were expressed freely beginning immediately after a person died. Mourners ripped their clothes, tore out their hair, wore sackcloth instead of regular clothes, sprinkled dust and ashes on their heads, and removed all jewelry. They wept, wailed, stopped eating, and were unkempt in appearance.

Absalom, David's third son, conspired to oust his father as king of Israel so he could take his place. When David found this out it caused him great distress. David and all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem at that time had to flee to avoid being killed by David's son, Absalom. David suffered not only because his son betrayed him but also because the kingdom was ripped from his hands by a traitor, his own son. Not only did David grieve but all his officials wept as they saw David's degradation from king to a barefoot wanderer.⁷

Sadly, however, Absalom was killed by David's general, Joab, and David, again, grieved the death of another son. When David received the news that his son was killed, he went to his room and wept. As he went, he wailed loudly, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you – O Absalom, my son, my son!"⁸

⁶ 2 Samuel 13:31.

⁷ 2 Samuel 13:16-36.

⁸ 2 Samuel 18:33.

According to *The New American Commentary* David mourned so much for Absalom because he really was *his son*. David saw his sins, his weaknesses, his rebellion exaggerated in Absalom. Robert D. Bergen states:

“Everything in the story leads up to, and culminates in, this wail of anguish over his dead boy . . . Five times he repeated the words, ‘my son.’ This surely had a deeper note in it than that of the merely half-conscious repetition of words occasioned by personal grief. The father recognized how much he was responsible for the son. It is as though he had said: He is indeed my son, his weaknesses are my weaknesses, his passions are my passions, his sins are my sins.”⁹

In Psalm 31:9-10, David cried to God asking Him to show compassion and kindness because of the deep anguish of grief. David trusted that God would hear his cry since God knew all the grief that he had endured over his lifetime. David believed that God would indeed shower His mercy down on him since God was his Shepherd, his refuge, his dwelling place, and his comforter during the many times he had suffered from the pain of grief.

Grief affects body, mind, and soul. The pain of grief can be so intense that the tears seem to never dry up. Many grieverers may cry so much that their eyes may grow weak with sorrow, as David ‘s eyes did in Psalm 31:9. While sorrow affects sight, it can also affect other physical appearances as David knew well. The anguish of grief can be so heavy that it can drain all strength causing physical discomfort, mental distress, and even make it difficult to pray. The pain, hurt, and suffering from grief can cause the deterioration of the entire body.

⁹ Robert D. Bergen, *1 and 2 Samuel, The New American Commentary*, vol. 7 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 320.

Nights and days are filled with thoughts of hopelessness and helplessness, thinking of the “yesterdays” and feeling as if there will be no “tomorrows.” The dark tunnel of grief seems to have no end and mourning seems to be forever. God is needed during this painful time. Nothing will heal the pain of grief but knowing that God is always near, will hear cries of distress, and in His sovereignty comfort with His presence, and can help ease the pain and make traveling on the path to healing easier. Psalm 31:24 is encouragement that during the times of sorrow there is hope in the Lord for those who remain strong and trust in Him.

Even while trusting that the Lord is a loving, caring shepherd who watches over the griever and will restore their soul (Psalm 23:1, 3), there are some days when it appears the Lord is far away from us and we do not have any help. Grief has such an overwhelming presence that it keeps griever's feeling as if they are in the muck and mire of despair. The pain is so deep that there is no way to pull out from under the heavy burden. However, Psalm 139:2-3, 9-10 is a reminder that God knows each of His children. He knows when they sit and when they rise. He sympathizes with the pain His children are experiencing as He keeps a constant watch over them.

Since He is omnipresent (forever present) and omniscient (all knowing), those who believe can take comfort in knowing that whatever situations and circumstances they may be in the Lord's presence and protection will be there. In His presence grief will not be so dark because with the Lord the night will shine like the day because He is light and there is no darkness in Him. Because God is trusted in hopelessness, the overwhelming heaviness of grief will begin to subside, and the light will appear again.

Some sense of normalcy begins to appear on the horizon. At that time, a song of praise and thanksgiving should then be offered up to the Lord for His sustaining power through the long journey.

According to Psalm 30:11, 12, “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever.” These two verses indicate that those who grieve can be healed by the Lord and once healing takes place, recovery can be celebrated. The sackcloth which represents mourning and grieving can be replaced with clothes of gladness and joy.

The principles of grieving, healing, and rejoicing are demonstrated in the story of Naomi in the Book of Ruth. The Book of Ruth is profoundly human, a story with down-to-earth features with which a person can easily identify. Some people may see themselves in the story and empathize readily with poor Naomi, battered by life’s tragic blows-famine, exile, grief, loneliness- and recall their own bitter bruises.¹⁰

Naomi lived in Bethlehem with her husband, Elimelech, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. There was a famine in the land and the family moved to Moab. While in Moab, Elimelech died and the two sons married Moabite women. After ten years, Naomi’s sons died, and Naomi was left with two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi became bitter after the death of her loved ones and she decided to return home to Bethlehem since the famine was over. She believed she did not have a reason

¹⁰ Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1988), 2.

to remain in Moab. Naomi was grieving and believed the Lord's hand had gone out from her.¹¹

Not only did her grief cause her to be bitter but she also felt empty and useless. Orpah stayed with her family in Moab but Naomi's other daughter-in-law, Ruth, returned to Judah with her. She made a declaration that she would never leave Naomi and nothing would separate the two. Returning to Bethlehem, Naomi was recognized by neighbors and they cried out her name. However, immediately Naomi responded, "Do not call me Naomi but call me Mara because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."¹²

Grief and loss had engulfed Naomi to the extent that she did not want to be called Naomi which means "pleasant." She preferred to be called Mara which means "bitter." She had gone out full with a husband and two sons and the Lord had brought her back empty as she was widowed and childless.

Under the law, Israelites had to leave grain for gleaning for food for the needy. Ruth went out to glean in the fields so she and Naomi would have food. She gleaned in the fields of a wealthy relative of Naomi's husband whose name was Boaz. Naomi encouraged Ruth to continue to glean in Boaz's fields.

¹¹ Ruth 1:13.

¹² Ruth 1:20-21.

Boaz was Naomi's kinsman-redeemer. A kinsman-redeemer was a close, influential relative to whom members of the extended family could turn for help. This usually happened when the family line or possessions were in danger of being lost. He was responsible for buying back family land sold during a crisis.

As the relationship developed between Ruth and Boaz, Naomi was joyful and her healing had begun because she realized God had a plan that was unfolding. Her desire was that Ruth would find security by having a husband and wealth. Since Naomi owned the land that had belonged to her husband, Elimelech, she chose to sell it to Boaz. The Law of Moses required that when a man died childless, a close relative would marry the widow thus perpetuating the family name and keeping the land in the family.¹³ It was especially important when a man died without a son that someone should marry his widow so that a son would be born and the name would be carried on.

Ruth had been left childless. Since Boaz was a relative of Elimelech, he was eligible to serve as a redeeming relative to marry Ruth. Boaz was willing to follow the Law of Moses. Even though Naomi had all rights to the property of her husband as well as the right to marry Boaz, she relinquished her rights to claim marriage and property and instead gave advice to Ruth on the customs of how to appeal to her kinsman for protection and marriage. Healing for Naomi's soul was taking place because she began to concentrate on the welfare of her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

¹³ Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

Boaz married Ruth and they had a son named Obed which made Naomi exceedingly joyful. The women now called Naomi by her name and she did not rebuke them. She did not tell them to call her Mara because she was no longer bitter. The women told Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth" (Ruth 4:14-15).

Naomi took the son, laid him on her lap, and cared for him. The son named Obed was the father of Jesse and Jesse was the father of David. David was in the lineage of Jesus the Christ. Naomi's grief over the death of her husband and her two sons had left her bitter and empty but the birth of Obed had turned her sorrow into joy. There will be a time when "sorrow will turn into joy and mourning into a day of celebration" (Esther 9:22).

The Book of Ruth is a story that portrays God as involved in life's ordinary affairs; indeed, they are exactly the arena in which He chooses to operate. This book describes how God works through, not despite, the everyday faithful of His people.¹⁴

Reflecting on Naomi's story is encouragement to know that suffering lost may cause feelings of loneliness, regret and despair but when we trust in the Lord, these feelings can be temporary and can be replaced with joy, peace, and happiness. Today, in the 21st century, Naomi's story could possibly help to reaffirm to us that if God provided

¹⁴ Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., 3.

a way out of Naomi and Ruth's situation centuries ago, surely, He can deliver us out of what seems to be a hopeless situation now.

There will be times when we may feel downcast and in despair. However, as believers, if we would remember the work Jesus did at the cross, it may be assurance that eventually those negative feelings will disappear. Just as Boaz was the kinsman-redeemer for Naomi, we can rejoice in knowing Jesus is our Redeemer, buying back for us what we had lost. We were separated from God, our Father, for the sin committed in the Garden of Eden in the beginning of creation. However, the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross redeemed us back into right relationship with God.

Because grief is not respective of any person, the emotion can happen to anyone after the loss of a loved one. This is evident in John 11:35 when "Jesus wept." Jesus, the Son of God, had given up His divinity in heaven and took on flesh, coming through 42 generations to dwell among the people on earth being obedient to His Father.¹⁵ According to Philippians, "He who had the very nature of God made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself"¹⁶ (Philippians 2:7-8).

Jesus, who had begun His earthly ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing, had met many people. However, He had a special relationship with three siblings: Mary,

¹⁵ John 1:14.

¹⁶ Philippians 2:7-8.

Martha, and Lazarus. While Jesus was preaching about two days from where the siblings lived in Bethany, He received the message that Lazarus was sick and the sisters' message to Jesus was "Lord the one you love is sick" (John 11:3). Jesus's response to the sisters was, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). Jesus stayed where He was two more days. Martha and Mary were grieving over their brother's death and many Jews from Jerusalem had come to their house to comfort them in their loss.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Both sisters had the same message for Jesus when they saw Him, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). Martha's faith allowed her to believe that if Jesus had been there He would have prevented the death of her brother. She probably did not know how Jesus would help, but she believed He would. She believed that whatever Jesus asked God to do He would grant the request from Him. Martha's faith allowed her to believe Lazarus would be raised to life in the resurrection at the last day not understanding that Jesus was the resurrection and the life. Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead but He shed tears of grief as He showed His true humanity. Jesus could deeply sympathize with Martha and Mary's loss as He felt sorrow also.

The fact that Jesus wept in the presence of death demonstrated that it is not a sign of weakness nor improper for Christians to weep when their loved ones die. Jesus is the believer's great high priest who has gone through the heavens. For we do not have a

high priest who is unable to sympathize with our difficulties.¹⁷ Therefore, those who grieve can be comforted to know that Jesus, the Son of God, can sympathize with them because none of us can truly sympathize with someone else unless we have been through a similar experience ourselves. Jesus went through the experience of grieving with his friends, Mary and Martha, over the death of their brother, Lazarus.

Isaiah had prophesied that Jesus would be despised, rejected, and be a man of sorrows, who was familiar with suffering.¹⁸ Even though He wept over Lazarus, Jesus did not grieve because He knew Lazarus would live again because He would raise him from the dead. However, even though Jesus did not grieve when Lazarus died, He knew what grief was because He bore all humanity's grief. He knew what sorrow was because He carried all humanity's sorrow. He took the grief and sorrow on the cross at Calvary for humanity to have peace and to be healed from all transgressions, iniquities, and infirmities. Therefore, what Jesus said to Martha is still relevant today for all believers: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25).

Jesus raises those who are dead and He gives to them eternal life. Those who believe in Jesus, though they die physically, shall live again. There can be no resurrection apart from Jesus Christ, and there can be no eternal life apart from Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will experience resurrection because having the life Jesus gives, it

¹⁷ Hebrews 4:15.

¹⁸ Isaiah 53:3.

is impossible for death to defeat believers. God has given believers the victory over death and the grave.¹⁹

Death is universal and grieving is normal. Sorrow and pain can be overwhelming and devastating. However, the Apostle Paul reminds believers that these are light afflictions, which is but a moment, that will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.²⁰ In the suffering in this life, the power of God will transform the experience of the faithful believer into a glorious expectation. For now, in the Present Age, the sorrows, hurts, and pains, from the death of loved ones are temporary compared to the abundant, glorious, eternal life in heaven.

There are many references to grief, suffering and pain in the Bible. Table 1²¹ lists nine Hebrew words used in the Old Testament Scriptures for grief and suffering. Some examples are illustrated in the following Scriptures: Isaiah 53:4, our grief (*choliy*), our sorrows (*mak'ob*) and Lamentations 1:4, mourn (*yagah*). Table 2²² lists three Greek words for grief and suffering used in New Testament Scriptures for grief and suffering. Some examples are illustrated in the following Scriptures: John 16: 6, grief (*morah*) and 1 Peter 2:19, pain (*mak'ob*) and suffering (*puwqah*).

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:57.

²⁰ Corinthians 4:17.

²¹ Blue Letter Bible(US), "Word Study Greek and Hebrew", accessed March 21,2018, blueletterbible.org/search/search.cfm, criteria=grief & t=NIVHS=s-lexiconc.

²² Blue Letter Bible (US).

Table 1. Hebrew Words for Grief and Suffering

חָלָה	<i>Challah</i>	sick, beseech, be weak, grievous, wounded, pray, grief, grieved, pain, sorry, supplication, travail
חָלִי	<i>Choliy</i>	sickness, disease, grief, sick
יָגַה	<i>Yagah</i>	afflict, grieve, vex grief, sorrowful
יָגוֹן	<i>Yagown</i>	sorrow, grief
כֶּבֶד	<i>kě'eb</i>	sorrow, grief
כַּעַס	<i>ka`ac</i>	grief, wrath, sorrow, anger, angry
מַכְאֹב	<i>mak'ob</i>	sorrow, pain, grief
מָרָה	<i>Morah</i>	grief
פּוֹקָה	<i>Puwqah</i>	grief

Table 2. Greek Words for Grief and Suffering

υπέω	<i>Lypeō</i>	be sorrowful, grieve, make sorry, be sorry, sorrow, cause grief, be in heaviness
λύπη	<i>Lypē</i>	sorrow, heaviness, grievous, grudging, grief
στενάζω	<i>Stenazō</i>	groan, sigh, grief, grudge

In the Old Testament, David experiences of grief and sorrow (צער, *yagon*) are many. His grief (צער, *yagon*) and sorrow (*Yagown*) over the death of his third son Absalom was so intense that he lamented, “if only I had died instead of you” (2 Samuel 18:33). Additionally, when his child born to Bathsheba became ill, his grief (*yagon*) caused him to plead (*challah*) with God, fasted (*challah*) refused to eat and spent nights lying on the ground (*yagah*).

Naomi’s sufferings (צער, *yagon*) after the death of her husband, two sons, loss of her home in Bethlehem, her health and her ability to work were so overwhelming that she changed her name to Mara which means “bitter”, because the “Almighty has made my life bitter”²³ (מָרָא).²⁴ The book of Lamentations²⁵ gives an account of Jeremiah’s grief צער (*yagon*) over the destruction of Jerusalem.

²³ Ruth 1:3-4, 20.

²⁴ Strong Exhaustive Concordance, accessed March 21, 2018, biblehub.com/Hebrew/4751.htm.

²⁵ Lamentations will be discussed below in the section entitled “Theology of Hope” (page79).

Lazarus' two sisters, Martha and Mary, sent word to Jesus who was in Jerusalem that their brother was sick. Two days later when Jesus arrived in Bethany, He was told Lazarus had died and was in the tomb. Lazarus' sisters and neighbors were weeping and mourning the death of Lazarus. Jesus knew that Lazarus would live again but (John 11: 3,23) states He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Jesus wept δακρύω, (*kryō*) (John 11:31).

The Bible contains many examples of human grief. Abraham grieved the death of his wife, Sarah. Genesis 23:2 states, "Sarah died in Kiriath-arba in the land of Canaan; Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." Canaan was the land God had promised Abraham. Even though, Abraham grieved for Sarah, he negotiated with the Hittites to buy the land in Canaan as a burial site.²⁶ After the death of Sarah, Genesis 24: 1 states, "Abraham was now old and well advanced in years and the Lord had blessed him in every way." Later, Abraham married Keturah and they had six sons (Gen. 25:1-2). Abraham's grief over Sarah's death did not keep him from leading a fruitful life.

According to 1 Kings 17: 17- 24, there was a widow at Zarephath whose son was very ill and dying. The widow cried out to Elijah, the prophet, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remain me of my sin and kill my son?" Elijah cried out to the Lord, interceding for the son. The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life was returned to him, and he lived. Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know you are a

²⁶ Genesis 23:12- 20.

man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.” The widow showed faith in the God of Israel. Her mourning had turned to gladness.

The New Testament reveals that godly men grieved the death of Stephen: “Some devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2).²⁷ The death of Stephen caused the Christians to scatter and they took the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went (Acts 8:4), according to the instructions Jesus had given them to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The apostle Paul also grieved as he anticipated the death of Epaphroditus, a fellow worker in the Lord. He wrote to the church in Philippi, “For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so I would not have sorrow upon sorrow” Phil 2:27).²⁸ According to *The Believer’s Commentary*, Paul already had considerable grief in connection with his imprisonment. If Epaphroditus had died, Paul would have had additional sorrow.²⁹ Furthermore, Scripture reveals that God grieved. According to Genesis 6:6, “The Lord was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain”. He grieved the wickedness of humanity before the flood that destroyed the entire earth. The Holy Spirit, also, grieves when believers sin against one another (Ephesians 4:30)³⁰

²⁷ Paul Tautges, *Comfort Those Who Grieve: Ministering God’s Grace in Time of Loss* (Leominster, Hr6 8NZ: Day One Publication, 2009), 48.

²⁸ Tautges, *Comfort Those Who Grieve*, 49.

²⁹ MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, 1970.

³⁰ Tautges, *Comfort Those Who Grieve*, 49.

Sorrows testify to the reality that grief is a part of the human experience. Grief could be understood by seeking the ministry of God's comfort. Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 1:3- 7, "God is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort". There is no comfort that does not ultimately come from God. He comforts us in all our afflictions, in the midst of our grief and pain, God comes to our aid.³¹ According to Paul Tautges, "The purpose for which He comforts us is so that we may comfort others. We will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God".³²

Grief could, also, be understood by believers as the anticipation for the fullness of redemption that belongs to us through Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 gives encouragement to those who believe in the work of the cross that even though we weep and may be burdened by the loss of a loved one, we can be filled with the anticipation of the promise of something better to come. According to Philippians 1:6, it states, "That He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to the completion until the day of Christ Jesus". The Holy Spirit has been given to believers as a pledge, a down payment, the promise of something more to come, which is the resurrection. According to 2 Corinthian 5:4, our mortal bodies will be swallowed up by death and

³¹ Tautges, *Comfort Those Who Grieve*, 50.

³² Tautges, *Comfort Those Who Grieve*, 51.

when our bodies are raised from the grave we shall receive new glorified bodies, that will never die.³³

Theology of Support

Genesis 2:18 which states, “It is not good for man to be alone,” is the first relationship recorded in Genesis and in the Bible. Genesis, the first book of the Bible revealed the relationship of God to man, the relationship of man to animals, and ultimately the relationship of husband and wife which began the relationship of family. From this first relationship that was created in the beginning, it establishes the principle that speaks of humans’ fundamental need to connect with others in human community.

Christians believe that God loves humans so much that He made Himself human in Jesus in order to redeem humanity. According to John 3:16, “He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”.³⁴ God cares for all humanity and He is concerned about the suffering and pain of all people. This is evident from Genesis 1:26 which states that God made humans in “our image, in our likeness.” The image of God (Latin: *image dei*) refers to the immaterial part of humanity. It sets human beings apart from the animal world, fits them for the dominion God intended them to have over the earth (Genesis 1:28) and enables them to commune with their maker, God. It is a likeness mentally, morally and socially.³⁵

³³ Tautges, *Comfort Those Who Grieve*, 54.

³⁴ All Scripture quotations are taken from NIV.

³⁵ Got Questions, goquestion.org/image-of-God.html. Accessed March 21, 2018.

Because man is made in the image of God, man has a privileged place in God's created world with the privilege of special responsibilities and tasks. We are to use this unique power to befriend and help God's created world, as well as to be the "stewards" of God who "manage" God's property in the interest of the Creator's good will for the whole created world.³⁶

According to the *Believer's Bible Commentary*, to be made in God's image and according to His likeness means that man was placed on earth as God's representative, and he resembles God in certain ways. Just as God is the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), so man is a tripartite being (spirit, soul, and body).³⁷

God is revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The faith of the Christian church is that God is Triune. Therefore, the relational and communal nature of the Godhead and of those created in "our image".

Even though humanity was created in the image of God, in His likeness, it does not exempt them from pain and suffering that the human race may experience. However, some hard and painful experiences in human lives are simply the result of human beings' finite creatures, it is part of humans' creaturely existence that there is decay as well as growth, loss as well as gain, pain as well as pleasure, sickness as well as health, death as well as birth. Creatively, life at best is fragile, vulnerable and

³⁶ Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 150.

³⁷ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 33.

temporary.³⁸ Scripture is quite honest about this: Humans are like the flowers in the field that wither and die (Psalms 103:15); (Isaiah 40:6-7).

Theologically, humans suffer because of the consequences of the account of the disobedience of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15). After the fall of Eve and Adam in the Garden of Eden, God cursed the ground, so that humans can stay alive only through much toil; the pain of childbirth is greatly increased for all women (Gen. 3:16-19); death and all the suffering attendant upon dying, have entered the world.³⁹ Concerning redemptive suffering, Christian believes that when accepted and offered up in union with the Passion of Jesus, that Jesus did remit the just punishment for one's sins or for the sins of others.⁴⁰ Isaiah prophesied, the Suffering Servant, would "surely, take up our infirmities and carry our sorrows; He would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities".⁴¹ Jesus fulfilled this prophecy at the cross of Calvary.⁴²

Unity is developed in relationships and through the development of relationships, support is generated. The theory that people need people is very important and has proven to be true in the grief process. Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian points

³⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 171.

³⁹ Baker's Evangelical Dictionary, biblestudytools.com/dictionary/suffering dictionary, (Longman 2012) (Muehlenberg 2012)" suffering", accessed March 22, 2018.

⁴⁰ Baker' Evangelical Dictionary.

⁴¹ Isaiah 53: 4-5.

⁴² Matthew 27: 27-56, Mark 15: 16-41, Luke 23:26-49 and John 19: 17-37.

out, “Community is deeply grounded in the Trinitarian nature of God. It flows from who God is. Because He is community, He creates community. Therefore, the making of community may not be an optional decision for Christians. It is compelling and irrevocable necessity, a binding divine mandate for all believers at all times.”⁴³

According to Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., “The oneness of God is the unity of a community of persons who love each other and live together in harmony. There is a deep, intimate indissoluble unity in them. They are only what they are in relationship and would not exit apart from it.”⁴⁴

In addition, Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 states, “Two are better than one, ... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up! But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” This scripture is encouragement that people need one another and relationships are crucial and significant. There will be occasions during the grief journey when persons will need to be inspired, reassured, and lifted. The journey of grief and life itself should not be walked alone but can surely benefit from moral support from others. Support may mean just being present, to be there for those who are hurting, and to lend a listening ear without giving unwanted advice. Unfortunately, sometimes when moral support is intended to help in times of need, the outcome may cause more despair and hopelessness.

⁴³ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Local Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), quoted in Carolyn Taketa, “Why Small Groups?: the reason behind intentional Christian community,” *SmallGroups.com*, last modified 2012, accessed March 10, 2018, smallgroups.com/article/2012/why-small-groups.html.

⁴⁴ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 77.

This is evident in the story of Job. The Old Testament book about Job is the supreme offering of the human mind to the living God and one of the best gifts of God to humanity. Job is a prodigious book in the vast range of its ideas and in the intensity of passions. It plumbs the depth of human despair, the anger of moral outrage and the anguish of desertion by God. It is only God Himself who bring Job joy in the end.⁴⁵

The Book of Job confronts humanity with failure and with suffering for which there is no explanation. Humans are faced to rethink prejudices; rethink theology; rethink the meaning of pastoral care in the face of injustice and suffering.⁴⁶

God sometimes allow or ordains that humans walk in the valley of the shadow, perhaps because it may be that there is no other way of discovering the comforting rod and staff. Or, perhaps it is because of some inscrutable providence of His own in which, in all His love and grace, and not the slightest manipulatively, He calls on us to be His servants through our pains and our frailties within wider purposes in heaven than we on earth can discern. This seems to be part of the point of the book of Job.⁴⁷

Job was a blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned many camels, sheep, oxen, donkeys, and many servants.⁴⁸ God allowed Satan to destroy Job's wealth and family. Job grieved his

⁴⁵ Francis I. Anderson, *Job*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 15-16.

⁴⁶ David Atkinson, *The Message of Job Bible, Suffering and Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 14.

⁴⁷ Atkinson, *The Message Bible*, 14.

⁴⁸ Job1:1-3.

loss by shaving his head and tearing his robe. But God would not allow Satan to take Job's life even though Satan afflicted Job's body with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. However, Job never cursed God as he was advised to do by his wife.⁴⁹

In the meantime, Job had three friends who heard about all his troubles. They agreed to meet, sympathize, and comfort him. Even from a distance when they saw him, they could hardly recognize Job and they began to grieve. They wept loudly, tore their robes, and sprinkled dust on their heads. They were silent for seven days and seven nights just sitting to comfort and support him with their presence.

Inasmuch as, Job's friends sympathized and grieved over Job's situation, nevertheless, when confronted with human pain, they found it hard to let down their defenses. They could not live with the human suffering which Job embodied. They had to look for causes. They wanted solutions. They had to search for answers that defined the logic of their own theological position. They had to proclaim the truth. They insisted on treating suffering only as a problem to be solved, rather than being willing to cope with the uncertainty of facing its mystery.⁵⁰

After seven days and seven nights the unwanted and unneeded advice began which did not help Job in his suffering. His three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, gave advice that was judgmental, condemning, and discouraging for Job. There were

⁴⁹ Job 1:3-2:10.

⁵⁰ Atkinson, *The Message of Job*, 15.

three rounds of speeches as each person took turns to accuse, condemn, and judge. Eliphaz insinuated that since Job was upright and innocent, why then was he being destroyed? Those who sow trouble will reap it.⁵¹

Bildad's diagnosis as to why Job was in this position was that his children had sinned and God does not prevent justice; therefore, God gave them over to the penalty of sin. Bildad then advised Job to plead his dilemma to God Almighty and since Job was pure and upright, God would rouse Himself on Job's behalf and restore him to his rightful place.⁵² Zophar accused Job of sinning against God and if Job would only repent, devote his heart to God, stretch out his hand to God, put away the sin that is in his hand, and allow no evil to dwell in his tent, then Job could lift his face without shame.⁵³

Added to the conversation was another person, Elihu, who continued to challenge and analyze Job.⁵⁴ Elihu accused Job like the other three. He surmised that Job was suffering for some wrong that he committed. He advised Job to take responsibility for whatever brought these difficulties upon him. If he would take responsibility for what he had done, Job would receive grace from God.

Finally, God began a dialogue with Job. However, God never answered why Job had to suffer from the loss of everything he had, including his health. God demonstrated

⁵¹ Job 4:7-9.

⁵² Job 8:3-7.

⁵³ Job 11:13-15.

⁵⁴ Job 32:1-37:24.

to Job His sovereignty with a series of questions concerning nature that only God could do. Job acknowledged that God is all powerful as well as all loving. Job acknowledged that God was sovereign and powerful enough to do all things.⁵⁵

After Job prayed for his friends, God restored everything he had lost. He was prosperous again and he was given twice as much as he had before. Job's sisters, brothers, and everyone who had known him before came to eat with him. They consoled and comforted him over all the trouble God had allowed to happen to him. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first.⁵⁶ Job posed a question to his wife when she advised him to curse God and die. Job asked the question, "Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" (Job 2:10) This question is worth pondering for believers today.

Job endured the agony of his suffering and surely, he did not delight in the hardships, yet he honored God through heart-wrenching circumstances. He trusted God through suffering and afflictions. Xochitl E. Dixon's response to Job's suffering was explained,

It's natural to prefer avoiding the bitter bites in life. We can even be tempted to lash out at God when we are hurting. But the Lord uses trials, teaching us how to trust Him, depend on Him, and surrender to Him as He enables us to persevere through difficult times. And like Job, we don't have to enjoy suffering to learn to savor the unexpected sweetness of sour moments—the divine strengthening of our faith.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Job 38:1 – 40:6.

⁵⁶ Job 42:10-12.

⁵⁷ Xochitl E. Dixon, "Sweet and Sour," *Our Daily Bread*, last modified September 22, 2017, accessed March 10, 2018, odb.org/2017/09/22/sweet-and-sour/.

There may be many problems and many questions from those who are suffering. Job, a good and godly man, had questions. He suffered and suffered intolerably which, seemingly, never would end. Job seemed to have a sense of abandonment by family, by friends and by God, Himself.⁵⁸ Today, those who are suffering from loss could be like Job and his friends, who had questions and wanted answers. The answer is to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and lean not on our own understanding.⁵⁹

Grief-stricken believers need love, comfort and fellowship to heal and be whole again. Loss and grief can shatter a person's life but God is faithful and His grace is sufficient to those who continue to trust in Him.

However, there are many occasions in Scripture where support is given by friends, family and God after a loss. Luke 15, is known as "The Lost Chapter" where there were three days of celebration on three different occasions not from the death of a loved one but grief is not always about a person's death. Any loss can be grieved because of the separation that has happened in a person's life which leaves a void.

The first loss was the Parable of the Lost Sheep. There were one hundred sheep and one was lost. After the lost sheep was found, all the friends and neighbors were called together to rejoice. A celebration took place because the lost sheep was found.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Atkinson, *The Message of Job Bible*, 14.

⁵⁹ Proverbs 3:5.

⁶⁰ Luke 15:5-6.

The second account of loss that occurred was the Parable of the Lost Coin. A woman had ten silver coins and she lost one. She searched the house and found it. She called her friends and neighbors together to ask them to rejoice with her because she had found her lost coin.⁶¹

The third account of a loss was the Parable of the Lost Son. A man had two sons and the younger son wanted his inheritance which his father gave to him. The son left home, squandered all of his inheritance, and ended up feeding the pigs that ate better than him. When the young man came to his senses, he decided to go back home. His father welcomed him with open arms, gave him the best robe, put a ring on his finger, and killed a fattened calf to have a feast. A celebration took place because the son was lost but was found.⁶² Healing after all losses should be celebrated because after the struggles “your mourning can turn to dancing”.

Nonetheless, there are some positive results from supportive groups where a sense of community and togetherness has developed. Psalm 133:1 states, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head.” The psalmist gives a vivid picture that it is not only good but fragrant and refreshing to support each other and to come together in unity. It describes the joy of harmony among God’s people.

An example of this unity was established in Acts 2:42-46 after the ascension of Jesus. The believers gathered together in fellowship daily, to break bread and pray

⁶¹ Luke 15:8-9.

⁶² Luke 15:13 -15, 22-24.

together. They supported each other because they all had something in common when they met in the temple courts. Sometimes they even met in people's homes, praising God, and enjoying the fellowship of each other. Having this sense of community would build trust among the people, offer encouragement for the suffering, and aid in the healing process of the bereaved.

Scripture reminds us, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. ... If God is for us, who can be against us?"⁶³

And God was for Jesus. Jesus explained to His disciples saying, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. ... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. ... Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Jesus not only wanted the disciples to have support as they felt sorrow and loss after his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, but also as they continued to do His work on earth. The support would be the helper that Jesus would ask the Father to send. The word helper is also called the Paraclete which means, "One called to the side of another for help."⁶⁴ It can also mean an advocate. The helper is the Holy Spirit that comes to reside in all believers when they accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Just as Jesus had encouraged and assisted His disciples, the Holy Spirit would be there for them. Believers can depend on the Holy Spirit to guide, instruct, and encourage them every day. Jesus told His disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans" (John 14:18).

⁶³ Romans 8:28, 31.

⁶⁴ John 14:16. *James Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1999), 1321.

Even as Jesus hung on the cross, He was thinking of His earthly mother, Mary, and didn't want her to be left alone, as an orphan. This was her son who was being crucified and as she looked up at Him, her heart must have been breaking. As Jesus looked down at her, He probably felt such compassion, care, and love that He wanted her to be supported and taken care of after His death. He was her son but soon He would be her Savior. As His mother's Redeemer, He introduced His friend, John, whom He loved, to His Mother saying, "'Dear woman here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her home into his home" (John 19:26-27). Traveling on the journey to healing from grief, there is a need to have someone traveling alongside with you for comfort and support.

Theology of Hope

The Scripture to support a Theology of Hope is from Lamentations 3:19-25. Jeremiah is the author of the book of Lamentations and the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a young adult when God called and commissioned him to be a prophet, to prophesy to the people of Judah. For 40 years, Jeremiah prophesied to these people but they did not listen to the messages and they continued in their disobedience to God. God had promised the people of Judah that if they continued sinning against Him, He would allow the Babylonians to take them captive, bringing destruction on the entire nation by causing famine, destroying land, homes, and the temple.

As a result of all the destruction that was recorded in the book of Jeremiah, the book of Lamentations was written because Jeremiah was lamenting. The Hebrew word

for lament is קיב which simply means “to mourn aloud: wail.”⁶⁵ Jeremiah was wailing over the conditions of his people who were taken into captivity by the Babylonians for 70 years. Jeremiah was crying loudly over the destruction and the devastation of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. He was lamenting and feeling helpless and hopeless.

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet but he is also known as the prophet of hope. Biblical hope is a confident expectation that something good is going to happen because it is based on a solid certainty and rests on God’s sure promises.⁶⁶ Lamentations 3:19-25 states,

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed. For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.” The Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seek Him.

Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations to describe the grief of the nation of Judah and the grief he was experiencing because of the loss of his home and the captivity of the people who were taken to Babylon. In Lamentations 1-3:29, Jeremiah is recounting all the afflictions that he had predicted and witnessed that had occurred in

⁶⁵ Merriam-Webster, s.v. “lament,” updated March 10, 2018, accessed March 10, 2018, [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lament](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lament).

⁶⁶ J. Hampton Keathley, III, “Hope,” *Bible.org*, last modified April 22, 2005, accessed March 10, 2018, [bible.org/article/hope](https://www.bible.org/article/hope).

his homeland. The nation was suffering and Jeremiah felt helpless, hopeless, and alone, thinking, “There is no one to comfort me.”⁶⁷

In Lamentations 3:19-20, Jeremiah remembers all his feelings and emotions that caused him to be bitter, wounded, and irritated over the destruction of Judah. Jeremiah was sad, dismayed, and discouraged deep down in his soul. However, in Lamentations 3:21, Jeremiah has a shift in his attitude, a shift in his thinking. Therefore, his focus changes and when his focus changes he begins to have hope. His hope is revived when he becomes determined and makes an effort to think about the goodness of God. From Lamentations 2:22–24, Jeremiah remembers that God loves him and because of this love he would not be devoured or destroyed. God’s care, kindness, and concern for Jeremiah and all His people never stops, disappoints, or declines.

In the beginning of Jeremiah’s and Jerusalem’s weeping, there was dreadful silence, but later, in Christ, God responded by standing right beside them and weeping with them, not simply as One who *understands* their pain, but as One who representatively *participates* in their pain.⁶⁸

In addition, all of God’s blessings are new each morning. God does not give out blessings that are used or old but gives blessings that are fresh and brand new. His devotion and love are unlimited and endures forever. Jeremiah reminds himself that the Lord is his help; therefore, he will wait on the Lord for mercy and grace as well as

⁶⁷ Lamentations 1:21.

⁶⁸ Robin Parry, *Lamentations*, Two Horizon Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. R. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 204.

deliverance from the bitterness that had kept Jeremiah feeling doom and gloom.

Lamentations 3:25 is encouragement to persons who have allowed bitterness to control their lives to shift their attitude and began to hope in the Lord. This verse is a promise that God will be good to those who have faith in Him, who look for Him, who pursue Him, and who try to find Him. Even though persons may weep and lament over suffering, hurt, and pain, God promises in His Word and His promises are trustworthy, stating that, “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning”.⁶⁹

There is hope in what appears to be hopeless situations. When loss occurs, it can be devastating and the pain and hurt seems to never end. Our souls may be downcast but when we remember God’s great mercies and that He is our portion (Numbers 18:20), we realize that God is all we need. We can have hope and we can look forward to the future.

Just as Jeremiah lamented over the condition of Judah and the people, he felt hopeless and helpless. After the death of loved ones, those grieving may experience some of those same feelings. And, as they talk to the Lord, they may cry out in anger with complaints of abandonment and feelings of being forsaken. Cries of despair, doubt and protest are poured out to the Lord. Sometimes hurt, pain and sorrow are cried out to the Lord in prayer.⁷⁰ When those cries happen, these types of prayers are known as

⁶⁹ Psalm 30:5.

⁷⁰ “Psalm of Communal Lament,” Wikipedia, accessed March 10, 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/psalm_of_communal_lament#list_of_psalms_of_communal_lament.

Lament prayers that may sometimes be called prayers of the forsaken.⁷¹ People usually think of prayers as praises and thanksgiving to God, for blessings and grace that He has poured out to them. However, prayers of lament, crying out to the Lord, are intended to express empathy for people who are suffering as a result of a loss. They are sometimes used in corporate worship or corporate gatherings. There are approximately 65 lament psalms and at least seven corporate lament psalms.

One example of a Lament Psalm that speaks to all of life is Psalm 88. This Psalm is called the “blackest of all the Lament Psalms” because it is the “cry of the soul.”⁷² It could speak to the darkness in a person’s life after suffering a loss.⁷³ Usually, the structure of lament psalms includes the following:

- the address or introduction (invocation to the Lord).
- the lament (complaint, the real problem).
- the request for help (confession, trust in God).
- prayer (an expression of certainty that the Lord will hear and answer the request).
- end (vow, offer of thanksgiving of praise).⁷⁴

⁷¹ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins House, 1992), 17.

⁷² Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, III, *The Cry of the Soul: How our Emotions Reveal our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Spring, CO: Navpress, 1994), quoted in Bill Muehlenberg, “The Lament Psalms,” *Culture Watch*, last modified February 2, 2012, accessed March 10, 2018, billmuehlenberg.com/2012/02/02/the-lament-psalms/.

⁷³ Muehlenberg, “The Lament Psalms.

⁷⁴ “The Ketuvim,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed March 10, 2018, britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/The-Ketuvim#ref597821.

The lament or complaint psalms express reverence and disappointment; “God whom I praise, break your silence (Psalm 109:1). They experienced dogged hope and mourning despair; “I am here, calling for your help, praying to you each morning: why do you reject me? Why do you hide your face from me?” (Psalm 88:13-14, NRSV). They have confidence in the character of God and exasperation of the inaction of God; “I say to God, my rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’” (Psalm 42:9, NRSV)

The Lament Psalms teach us to pray our inner conflicts and contradictions. They allow us to shout out our forsakenness in the dark caverns of abandonment and then hear the echo return to us over and over until we bitterly recant of them, only to shout them out again. They give us permission to shake our fist at God one moment and break into doxology the next.⁷⁵ These prayers are usually prayed to God, the Father, who is the Sovereign King. God is perfectly capable of handling our anger and frustration and disappointment.⁷⁶

In addition, the theology of hope has a strong foundation built on Jesus Christ and His crucifixion. The doctrine of Christ’s death and resurrection is the foundation of Christianity. All Christians believe this truth and, therefore, they live by faith that they will enjoy everlasting life in heaven with God, the Father of Jesus Christ. Christ’s resurrection is for all who believe and accept the free gift of salvation which is based on the work Jesus did on the cross. Those who believe can have everlasting life. Because of

⁷⁵ Foster, *Prayer*, 23.

⁷⁶ Foster, *Prayer*, 12.

Jesus's crucifixion, He bore the sting of death and made atonement for sin. There is hope and expectation that those who died in Christ will be raised in incorruptibility and immortality.

Christ rose from the dead and all those who are in Christ shall rise. There is a blessed hope for those who die believing in Christ, not Adam, who came from earth.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."⁷⁷

Through faith in Jesus there is victory over death and the grave. Death is robbed of its sting and it was robbed at the cross with the death of Jesus Christ. There is hope in the belief that some will be alive during the second coming of Jesus. However, according to 1 Corinthians 15:51, living or dead, all will be changed and receive a resurrected body.

Paul, who was an apostle of Jesus Christ, wrote to the Thessalonians to encourage them. As believers, he wanted to give hope to those grieving because he did not want them to be uninformed. He wrote, "We do not want you to be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:52-54.

⁷⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:2, 13-14.

There wasn't anything wrong with feeling sorrowful over the death of loved ones. But Paul was informing the Thessalonians that those who had confessed with their mouth and believed in their hearts that God had raised His Son Jesus from the dead was saved. Their righteousness had been obtained by faith.⁷⁹ And, God set His seal of ownership on them and put His Spirit in them as a deposit guaranteeing what was to come.⁸⁰ The seal is the mark of ownership and security. The Spirit indwelling the believer is the mark that the believer now belongs to God and that he is eternally saved.⁸¹ Therefore, those who are absent from this temporary world, but "resting" will be resurrected and come back with Jesus, at the second coming. Those who are still living will not precede those who are just "sleeping" in Christ.

When Paul referred to "sleep" he was referring to the body as resting, not the soul, until Jesus comes back a second time. He wanted to assure the loved ones of Christians who had died that there is no need for useless sorrow. Sorrow is not ruled out but what is ruled out is the despairing grief of those who have no hope of heaven or the reunion of their loved ones who are just sleeping. "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up".⁸²

⁷⁹ Romans 10:9-10, 6.

⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.

⁸¹ MacDonald, *Believer's Commentary*, 1823.

⁸² 1Thessalonians 5:9-11.

The same encouragement that Paul encouraged the people in Thessalonica, may be given in grief support groups for those who are grieving the death of their loved ones. A trained facilitator may share the blessed hope to the loved ones of those who are “sleeping” and died in Christ. The blessed hope that when Jesus comes back, their loved ones will be raised from their sleep and come back with Jesus. They will have eternal life for their belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, their Savior.

Concerning the living hope, Peter wrote to the elect in Asia Minor to give praise to God for the living hope in Jesus Christ. Because of God’s great mercy, He has given all believers a new birth and a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade that is kept in heaven for the believers who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the day of salvation.⁸³ However, those hurting and grieving in the present will greatly rejoice because of this living hope and glorious inheritance. Life is not only what we see on earth but there is a promise that we will see our loved ones again for those who have died in Christ.

For in Jesus Christ there is a blessed hope. This hope can transform and can have value when there is trust in the resurrection of the risen Jesus who took on all transgressions on the cross at Calvary. Even though grief and suffering of all kinds may occur in life, sometimes they happen to increase faith. This faith can comfort and sustain those who grieve, but not grieve as if there is no hope. Even while persons are

⁸³ 1 Peter 1:3-5.

suffering and grieving, Peter encourages them writing, “Under God’s mighty hand He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. And the God of all who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Believers are invited to be partakers of His divine nature through God’s promises for His children. Promising that joy will come in the morning after troubles, tribulations, and suffering when absolute trust in God prevails, believers can overcome bitterness, despair, and other emotions caused by grieving. When persons trust in the living, all powerful God and His grace that abounds, those who grieve may eventually be able to rejoice in any circumstances.⁸⁴ Grace from God is the overflowing favor that He pours out each day. It can be drawn from in the moment of need. It is God’s amazing gift of power to live with dignity in the present and hope for the future.

Paul suggests that even though suffering occurs, those who suffer can have hope, along with peace and joy because they have been justified through faith with God through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Romans explaining this concept,

And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us. (Romans 5:2-5)

⁸⁴ 2 Peter 1:3-4.

The living hope Himself, Jesus, encouraged His disciples to have hope even in their grief because their grief would turn to joy. Jesus informed them that He was going away, back to His Father in heaven who had sent Him to earth to dwell among them. Jesus said to them, “In a little while you will see no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”⁸⁵ Probably Jesus was assuring the disciples that after His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, they would see Him again when He came back to them in His Second Coming.

As Jesus continued this discourse with His disciples, He promised them that their grief would turn into rejoicing. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth; you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”⁸⁶ This was a wonderful promise given to Jesus’ disciples and this same promise is relevant for believers in this present age.

Jesus also comforted the disciples promising them that when he went away, he would prepare a place for them saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust in me, in my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am” (John 14:1-3).

⁸⁵ John 16:16.

⁸⁶ John 16:20-22.

Jesus reassured the disciples that in heaven were many dwelling places and He would prepare a place for prepared people, those who had been redeemed by His blood. Jesus would not have given them false hope. In other words, provisions are made for all those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior because He is the way, the truth, and the life. In addition, there is hope that one day there will be no more suffering. Jesus is not only the way, the truth, and the life, but He is also the Bread of Life and those who come to Him will no longer go hungry, and he who believes in Jesus will never be thirsty. For God's will is that everyone who looks to the son Jesus and believes in Him shall have eternal life and Jesus will raise them up at the last day.⁸⁷

Palm 147:11 inspires believers that "The Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love." Author Sarah Young comments on this verse of scripture by writing,

God delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love. Fear of the Lord is the foundation of spiritual wisdom and knowledge. It consists of reverential awe, adoration, and submission to God's will. In the world today, many people are feeling desperate. They have become disillusioned and cynical because they put their confidence in the wrong thing. But God's *steadfast* love will never let you down—it will never let you go! Cling to hope, beloved. It's a golden cord connecting you to God.⁸⁸

Grieving is heavy on the soul and the spirit. It may be very difficult to submit to the Lord during this time of sorrow and to turn all grief, pain, and suffering over to Him.

⁸⁷ John 6:35, 40.

⁸⁸ Sarah Young, *Jesus Always: Enduring Love in His Presence* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 272.

But no matter what is happening, people can find hope in God's unfailing love. That love was demonstrated according to John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Therefore, in keeping with this promise, believers are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.⁸⁹ The new heaven and new earth is the place God has prepared for His people for eternity and God will live with them forever. All believers can have an unwavering faith in the hope that God has set His seal in them and put His spirit in their hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come.⁹⁰

The Book of Revelation reveals more about the new heaven and new earth. It is the last book in the Bible and is an apocalyptic literature as well as a book of hope. Apocalypse means uncovering, unveiling, or reveling. The central message of the Book of Revelation is that God and good will win over evil. Revelation looks forward to the future consummations, the unfolding of all things, and the eventual triumph of God and the Lamb.

John was a prisoner on the island of Patmos because of his loyalty to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day, he was in the Spirit when the revelation of future events was given by God to Jesus Christ. Jesus in turn committed it to His angel, and the angel made it known to John. John was to share all this revelation with all believers. For all believers there is a blessed hope that has been revealed to

⁸⁹ 2 Peter 3:13.

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:22.

John. In the conclusion of the revelation John reports these things:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. I saw a Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4)

The new heaven and the new earth is the New Jerusalem that is eternal where believers will commune with God. All God's people will enjoy communion with Him closer than ever dreamed. In the New Jerusalem there will be no more death and grieving over the loss of loved ones. All sorrow, pain, and crying will end forever.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grief is defined as an emotional response to loss, either real or perceived. Sandra Giddens began the conversation on loss in her 2000 work, *Coping with Grieving and Loss*, as an experience that people live and grow with. She defined grief as the combination of thoughts and feelings a person experiences about a loss.¹ While some losses are positive, such as moving into a new home or graduating from school, other losses are difficult to live with, such as severed relationships. She acknowledged that the greatest feeling of loss is the death of a loved one. Kenneth C. Haugh in his 2004 booklet, *A Time to Grieve: Journeying through Grief*,² agrees that grief is a shock to the entire body that affects the thoughts and feelings of the person who is grieving. The pain is so intense that the griever's mind is overwhelmed. Haugh asserted that grief could stir up in the griever feelings of anger, a huge amount of upset and resentment at self, family, friends, and sometimes even the deceased.³

In addition, Paul C. Rosenblatt and Beverly R. Wallace in their 2005 book, *African-American Grief*,⁴ believe that many African-Americans who have lost loved ones might feel forced to limit or control strong grief feelings because they lack someone to provide support and nurturance. They then begin to develop the behavior of hiding their

¹ Giddens, *Coping with Grief and Loss*, 1.

² Haugh, *A Time to Grieve*, 7.

³ Haugh, *A Time to Grieve*, 7.

⁴ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 126.

feelings. Because of the African-American culture, a number of them were taught to be strong, to endure, to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, and to continue. “Being strong in grief” meant, in part, feeling alone. While many ethnicities may talk about needing to be strong in dealing with loss and were often encouraged by others to be strong, for African-Americans this means in general to grieve privately after the funeral. “Don’t let them see you cry” is being strong and a means of disguising their true feelings while internally African-Americans are falling apart.⁵ However, while “being strong in the grief” especially, in public, there are times when feelings cannot be controlled. Sometimes there is such an extreme response to death that disguising true feelings is not possible.

R. Neal Siler in his 2010 book, *How I Got Over: Healing for the African-American Soul*,⁶ is familiar with the saying, “don’t let them see you cry.” Because of their culture, African-Americans were taught to be strong and to endure hardships without complaining even though the pain was deep. Therefore, males were taught not to cry since crying was considered to be a sign of weakness. They risked appearing vulnerable and could be taken advantage of if weakness was detected. However, Siler contends that it is okay to cry during the grieving process because crying is generally a sign that a person is experiencing something overwhelmingly emotional. When suffering the loss of

⁵ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 123.

⁶ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 136.

a loved one, no person should be obligated to be strong. The fullest strength will be found in grieving the loss and trusting God for renewed guidance.⁷

Siler contends that it actually takes a strong person to surrender to the overpowering emotions that mark one's life with the profound pain and sadness that, to hurt, to lament, and to cry out to Him about what is fair or unfair as well as what is just or unjust.⁸ However, Norine Dresser and Fred Wasserman in their 2010 book, *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love*,⁹ believe showing emotions by crying is normal but healing from the pain of grief should take a different path, even though they recognize that grief is not a problem to be solved but rather it is a process to be lived. In their assessment there is no prescribed path or exact recipe for the grief journey because everyone grieves differently. They believe time does not heal the wounds that a loss leaves but it is what grievers do with the time that matters. They acknowledge that although death is universal and affects everyone, talking about death is generally taboo in American society.

Even though talking about grief may be taboo to many persons, Dresser and Wasserman felt those who are journeying through the grief process should find ways to express their feelings and thoughts knowing and trusting that the pain will ease. Although nothing will magically take away the pain that is experienced by the death of a loved one, there is a measure of comfort in talking to others who have experienced a

⁷ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 122.

⁸ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 123.

⁹ Dresser and Wasserman, *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love*, 147.

death of someone they loved. Dresser and Wasserman believe, “When the foundation of your home and life has been shaken by death, grief groups create a sense of community and help griever feel less isolated.”¹⁰

According to Arlene Churn in her 2003 book, *The End is Just the Beginning: Lessons in Grieving for the African-American*, she does not necessarily agree with this theory.¹¹ Even though she believes that those who grieve need help, few African-Americans will invite others to share in their grief and others will resent and refute the efforts of other people to help them in the process of healing. Churn does agree with Dresser and Wasserman that grief is an emotion that must be processed over time. The road to healing is often a long and lonely one.

Kenneth Doka in his 2016 writings, *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path through Loss*,¹² agrees with Churn that grieving persons often travel through grief privately. Most feel isolated and are afraid to share their feelings. They worry that their expressions may be misunderstood or dismissed, even though death is universal and is a critical life experience. Churn does clarify her reasons why she feels African-Americans will not share their feelings because of all they had experienced with issues of trust. Churn believes that African-Americans tend to mistrust the aid offered by agencies and organized groups because they are perceived as an impersonal approach to their very

¹⁰ Dresser and Wasserman, *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love*, 147.

¹¹ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 7.

¹² Kenneth J. Doka, *Grief is a Journey: Finding Your Path through Loss* (New York, NY: Altria Books, 2016).

personal suffering. As a result, African-Americans are often even more dependent on family and friends.¹³

In addition, Churn strongly believes that African-Americans have always drawn strength from close family ties and deep established relationships. Perhaps because of racism and other social diversions African-Americans have looked within the circle of family and friends for their main source of strength and survival.¹⁴

Siler agrees with Churn that there is a trust issue and a core belief held by many African-Americans. However, he disagrees with the theory which Churn proposes that African-Americans are even more dependent on family and friends. Siler believes strongly in the community of family and because of this strong connection, African-Americans refuse to impose their deep pain and anxiety upon their loved ones because for the most part their loved ones are in pain themselves.

Agreeing with Rosenblatt and Wallace on African Americans “masking” their feelings, Siler states that African-Americans have learned the art of masking as self-protection and exercise this behavior designed to keep them from carrying each other’s pain. Moreover, with this mindset, it causes African-Americans to draw on the strengths they have—determination and spirituality. While withholding their emotional selves from one another, African-Americans knew that God would hear their prayers.

¹³ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 41.

¹⁴ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 26.

Therefore, in praying and telling God about their pain and problems, they found some comfort and peace believing there was going to be a day of reckoning and retribution.¹⁵

Siler recalls that African-Americans relied heavily on their spirituality during the slavery era and even when they were forced to come to the New World, they learned to depend on their faith and trusted that God would always be there for them. The strength to endure in all their physical and psychological oppressions came from deep faith in God. They often described the source of their strength as coming from God while relying upon their inner faith and personal might to persevere. Even when they grieved they refused to appear weak to those who berated and denigrated them.¹⁶

Rosenblatt and Wallace agree with Siler that many grieving persons trust God after the death of a loved one and because of that trust, the survivors feel they are not alone because God will always be with them. God would take care of the person who died and God would take care of them as well.¹⁷ Not only did slaves believe that they would be chosen by the Lord, there is evidence that many of them felt their owners would be denied salvation.¹⁸

Churn's opinion on this issue is based on Psalm 90:9 where Moses sums up life by saying, "We spend years as a tale that is told" (KJV). Each life is a story with a

¹⁵ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 111.

¹⁶ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 110.

¹⁷ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 111.

¹⁸ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 34.

beginning, middle, and end. Naturally, the end is mourned by those who are left behind. However, African-Americans should never grieve without gratitude for the life of the departed and must always bear in mind that we live by the grace of God whose exclusive power of life and death is acknowledged.¹⁹

Even though Churn and Siler have different opinions coming from different perspectives concerning African-American dependency on families and friends, both of these views are adopted from the same root cause—the slavery era. Churn’s explanation on her theory of African-Americans being dependent on family and friends results from years of slavery. African-Americans learned to suppress feelings of pain because of what happened to their ancestors. Their ancestors came to America in chains in the sixteenth century by deceit and trickery. Because of this deceit, the mentality is that people as a whole cannot be trusted.

While enslaved in Africa, the slave owners were called “masters” who were uncomfortable with slaves mourning their loved ones’ deaths privately or publicly. Therefore, slaves were forced to mourn in a different manner. They became creative in their grieving by shedding tears and moaning chants. Most slave owners were fearful of the slaves’ primitive mystical traditions and often forbid them to mourn. Late at night most of the slaves found ways to grieve loss within the community as their community was their family.

¹⁹ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 17.

Since culture is a combination of common heritage, beliefs, values, and rituals that are an important aspect of racial and ethnic communities, this concept was brought over from Africa and continued in the New World. This attitude for healing the loss of a loved one was passed down from generation to generation and has had a large impact on African- Americans not sharing openly their sorrow, pain, anger, and grief.

Churn also agrees with Siler that these traditions were passed down from generation to generation and may account for not openly sharing their emotions when grieving. She also agrees with Siler that the source of strength for African- Americans to deal with grief goes back to the days of slavery where they always had a deeply embedded belief and faith in God. Faith sustained them for many generations as a people. They were taught that both the gift of life and the sting of death are solely “in the hands of God.” With this in mind, Churn contends that it must be remembered that death is not a divine punishment but rather a part of eternal life. It is the bridge from this world to the spiritual realm.²⁰

Rosenblatt and Wallace’s theory is that African-American grief is not only about specific loss but about other forms of oppression that followed slavery and, in many cases, has continued up to the present. They believe that grieving from African- American people is about the collective loss from ongoing oppression. It is also about

²⁰ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 16.

the collective loss that has happened in the African-American community as people try to cope with many losses or in a sense give up on trying to cope.²¹

Siler's explanation concerning African-Americans not imposing their deep pain and anxiety upon their loved ones began with the slave trade when a history of oppression was set in motion. Because of the history of oppression and many experiences of betrayal, both caused fear and suspicions with African-Americans. It was much easier to act in a way that "master" found acceptable that resulted in African-Americans suppressing their feelings and emotions. Doing so reduced the possibility of abuse. It made life a little easier for them.

Siler believes in the family as a community. As stated before, African-American families were experiencing enough pain, suffering, and anxiety themselves. Therefore, those who were hurting learned to mask their true feelings as protection but not just for themselves. They tried to protect their families as well. This behavior of masking hid their true selves. They were not free to express their thoughts and emotions because of the disrespect and humiliation that they constantly received. In addition, their loved ones were in pain and torment themselves and did not need any more pain heaped upon them.²²

²¹ Rosenblatt and Wallace, *African-American Grief*, 1.

²² Siler, *How I Got Over*, 110.

Even though slavery has ended, the stories of oppression as a slave were passed down from generation to generation. The behavior of wearing a mask to hide hurt and pain became a way of life and hiding behind the mask meant no one could see them for who they really were or connect with the pain they really felt. Stories are, for African-Americans, a lifeline and part of their heritage.²³

Not only does Siler believe in the family as a community, but he also recognizes the church as a community of believers. For the believers, church represents inclusion, acceptance, and belonging. It is a place where each person shares in each other's joy and pain. The church is a connecting link for African-Americans. Historically, the Black church has been the heart and soul of the African-American community. Even though each had their own families, the African-American life was centered on the church. For African-Americans as with the apostolic church, the church was traditionally defined as a hospital where the sick go for healing of the mind, soul, and spirit.

According to his writing, Siler believes strongly that the church was symbolic of what it meant to be "in" community. African-Americans regarded the church as the staple of the community. In the church, God meets everyone equally. The church was the hub of the culture and the greatest source of healing and help for the troubling circumstances of African-American life. The church was a place where the hurting could expect to find healing.²⁴

²³ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 111.

²⁴ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 160.

At various places in African-American worship, pain and struggle are legitimized as the hearts are focused on God. They believe He knows their sorrows and pain. For many African-Americans, God is their support group. They would rather talk to God instead of openly expressing their emotions to a group or even a counselor. It is a cultural expectation that one can “take their burdens to the Lord and leave them there.”²⁵ Without hesitation, African-Americans will open their souls to God in deeply personal and sometimes very desperate prayer. In songs they sing about their struggles. Music for the African-American depicts great faith and belief that God is not going to forsake the righteous.²⁶

Churn agrees that one of the strengths of African-American culture is that they can always find solace in a song, scripture, or in sayings handed down by elders who had weathered similar personal storms. Before support groups, therapy, and counseling, African-Americans gained strength and healing from songs. In addition, those simple chants still provide temporary comfort and postpone the need for an immediate answer to questions.²⁷

Levine believes that Africans brought to the English colonies as slaves in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries did not carry with them a network of beliefs, customs,

²⁵ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 161.

²⁶ Siler, *How I Got Over*, 114.

²⁷ Churn, *The End is Just the Beginning*, 28.

institutions and practices constituting what might be called with accuracy a unified “African” culture. No such cultural entity existed. The people of Africa created a myriad of languages, religions, customs, social, political, and economic institutions which differentiated them and gave them separate identities.²⁸ Blassingame disagrees because he argues that the African culture was not entirely removed from the slave culture through the process of enslavement and “was much more resistant” to the bludgeons that was slavery. African survivals persisted in the form of folk tales, religion, and spirituality, music and dance, and language.²⁹ Joining in this discussion is Raboteau who agrees with Blassingame that when over ten million Africans over four centuries were brought to the New World in the Atlantic slave trade, they were taken away from political, social, and cultural systems that had ordered their lives. And, in the New World, slave control was based on the eradication of all forms of African culture because of the power to unify the slaves and thus enable them to resist or rebel.

Nevertheless, according to Raboteau, African beliefs and customs persisted and were transmitted by slaves to their descendants.³⁰ Shaped and modified by a new environment, elements of African folklore, music, language and religion were transplanted in the New World by the African diaspora.³¹

²⁸ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 4.

²⁹ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1972), 262.

³⁰ Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

³¹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 4.

Genovese comments on the slave's family. Family was important to the slaves but for most slaves, slaveholders deprived black men the role of provider, refused to dignify their marriages or legitimize their issue, compelled them to submit to physical abuse in the presence of their women and children, made them choose between remaining silent while their wives and daughters were raped or seduced and risking death, and threatened them with separation from their family at any moment.³² Blassingame adds that the love the children had for their parents revealed clearly the importance of family. Although it was weak, although it was frequently broken, the slave family provided an import buffer, a refuge from the rigors of slavery. While the father could rarely protect the members of his family from abuse, he could often gain their love and respect in other ways.³³

Genovese describes the religion of slaves as the heart of black culture which emerged as a product of the black experience³⁴ and a way of ordering the world and of providing a vantage point from which to judge it. Like all religion, it laid a "basis for moral conduct and an explanation for the existence of evil and justice."³⁵ When the slaves' religious meetings had to be held in secret, the slaves were confronted with security problems. They developed creative means of notifying other slaves about these

³² Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1976), 490.

³³ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 191.

³⁴ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 288.

³⁵ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 162.

secret meetings. They would announce the event by such devices as that of singing songs such as “Steal Away to Jesus” while working.³⁶ Levine agrees that the slaves often pursued the “sweetness” of their religion in the face of many obstacles. Slaves broke the proscription against unsupervised or unauthorized meetings by holding their services in secret, well-hidden areas, usually referred to as “hush-harbors.”³⁷

Blassingame is in agreement that religion was very important in the lives of slaves and they had to find secret places to worship out of the eyes and ears of their masters. The slave’s faith in his God was deep and abiding. Religious faith often conquered the slave’s fear of his master. The slaves asserted that their master could afflict pain on his body but could not harm his soul.³⁸

Blassingame commented on the secret hiding places of the slaves that included “hush-harbors” where the slaves worshipped their “Divine Master.” However, Blassingame did add another name for hiding places that the slaves used to worship in secret even though Christianity had pervaded the slave community and cultural linguistic barriers which had impeded the evangelization of earlier generations of African-born slaves were no longer a problem.³⁹ The religious experiences of the slaves were not contained to the visible structure of the institutional church. The slaves attended a visible church with usually a mixed congregation. Apparently, the slaves

³⁶ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 236.

³⁷ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 41.

³⁸ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 146.

³⁹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 212.

could not worship freely so they organized “invisible institutions” outside of the visible institution.

Historically, many sermons preached by the masters’ preachers urged slaves to be obedient, docile, don’t steal and don’t lie, and was constantly repeated, just in case the slaves forgot. This was reason enough for the slaves to hold their own religious meetings, to talk about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Raboteau continues as he recalls the input from a former slave, Charlie Van Dyke, who had complained,

Church was what they called it but all the preacher talked about was for us slaves to obey our masters, and not lie or steal. Nothing about Jesus was ever said and the overseer stood there to see that the preacher talked as he wanted him to talk. Even the black preacher would get up and repeat everything that the white preacher had said because he was afraid to say anything different.”⁴⁰

That was an important reason why the slave community organized an extensive religious life of their own, hidden from the eyes of their masters. In the secrecy of the quarters or the seclusion of the brush arbors the slaves made Christianity truly their own. The “invisible institution” was any private place out of sight of the slaves’ owners and where meetings were held in secret at night. The meetings were held in gullies, bushes, swamps, ravines, and thickets. Slaves had developed creative ways on how to worship without being discovered. Sometimes they would use wetted quits and rags that kept the sound of their voices from penetrating the air. They formed circles on their knees around the speaker as he leaned forward and spoke in a whisper over a pot of water to drown out the sound, sometimes turning an iron pot or kettle upside down to

⁴⁰ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 215.

catch any sounds of praying, preaching, and singing. When they worshipped in their cabins, they used a pot that would be placed in the middle of the cabin floor or at the doorsteps filled with water to catch any sound, sometimes, they used a pot or kettle slightly propped up against the door to hold the sound of the praying and singing from escaping. If the slaves were caught holding secret worship meetings, the slaves would be punished by flogging. If black preachers were caught preaching at these meeting, he, too, would be punished and everyone attending the meeting would be flogged. There were many times when the slaves, if caught singing and praying in their cabins, would be punished. White slave owners thought when slaves prayed, they prayed against them, asking God to lift them out of their situation.⁴¹

Raboteau adds that the process of slaves' conversion to Christianity at one time was blocked by major obstacles, including acts passed by colonial legislators denying baptism, fearing that baptism would emancipate the slaves. Many false ideas existed among the slave owners for the objection of conversion to Christianity. The most serious was the argument that if a slave was converted to Christianity, the slave would be equal or higher in status than their masters. The slave owners' security was threatened. A continual complaint of masters was that Christianity would ruin their slaves by making them "saucy" since they would begin to think themselves equal to

⁴¹ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 213, 215, 217.

white folks.⁴² In addition, slave holders feared that Christianity would make their slaves not only proud but ungovernable, and even rebellious.⁴³

Those gatherings were important in the life of the slave community because they could forget all of their sufferings, thanking God they would one day be free and, most importantly, encouraging each other as they sang a hymn of praise, the slaves' spirits would be refreshed and they felt consoled in their time of distress. They looked forward, imaging their lives being better in the future, giving them hope in the present.⁴⁴ Genovese writes of the comments by an ex-slave from Texas who had explained that "the meetings gave slaves strength derived from direct communication with God and each other. But above all, the meetings provided a sense of autonomy—of constituting not merely a community unto themselves but a community with the leaders of their own choice."⁴⁵

Also, slaves' funerals became a pageant, a major event, a community effort at once solemn and spirited, notes Genovese. The slaves wanted a service in order to carry on the West African traditions that would put the departed spirit to rest and would guarantee against the returning of a stirring ghost. Since many masters didn't allow the

⁴² Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 102.

⁴³ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 103.

⁴⁴ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 219.

⁴⁵ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 238.

slaves to quit work in order to attend a funeral, the majority of the slaves' funerals were held at night.⁴⁶ Blassingame added that funerals were especially important to Africans, involved a long period of mourning and burial of personal objects of the deceased. The African belief was that upon dying one went "home."⁴⁷

Levine comments on the sacredness of songs, music, and dance for the slaves, which represented the ethos of the black folk, in freedom.⁴⁸ For the slaves, then, songs of God and the mythic heroes of their religion were not confined to a specific time or place but were appropriate to almost every situation.⁴⁹ Levine adds that humor and laughter were important for their survival. Humor allowed the black folks to laugh at and thereby gain some perspective upon their own anger.⁵⁰ Black humor provided splendid and important opportunities to laugh at the whites who so profoundly affected the quality of life black Americans lived.⁵¹ Blassingame agrees that the agony and joy of resignation and rebellion the spirituals were the unique creations of black slaves.⁵² Levine adds a comment from Claude McKay, a black poet, who states,

Even in the slaves' environment they learned to laugh and sing. The key to melancholy comic for himself and his race... No wonder the whites, after five

⁴⁶ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 197.

⁴⁷ Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 20, 21.

⁴⁸ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 190.

⁴⁹ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 31.

⁵⁰ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 324.

⁵¹ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 320.

⁵² Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 137.

centuries of contact, could not understand his race... No wonder they hated them, when out of their mechanical environment the blacks could create mad, contagious music and high laughter.⁵³

⁵³ Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 266, quoted in Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 320.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

The research used for this thesis-project consisted of three methods. All three methods required the consent of each participant, therefore the Gordon-Conwell Institutional Review Board (IRB) form was used as required by the seminary.¹

The first method used was a survey conducted from random members of the New Canaan Worship Center, the researcher's faith community.² There were 44 members who were randomly selected to complete the survey which consisted of five questions. These questions addressed significant loss, the person's opinion on attending grief support groups, and whether support groups would be helpful in the church they attend. The questionnaire also included two questions pertaining to age and gender of the person completing the survey. Ages ranged from 18 years through 55 years and over.

Those persons who completed the surveys did so without any hesitation and the majority was more than willing after finding out they did not have to sign their names. Each participant was assigned a number for confidentiality purposes.

The females surveyed were 33 compared to 11 males as illustrated in Table 7 on page 124 below. The answer for the first question, "Have you suffered a significant loss within the last three years?" resulted in 23 females answering with "yes" and ten with "no." The females who attended Grief Support group indicated they felt the groups

¹ See Appendix A: IRB consent.

² See as Appendix B: Grief Group Support survey.

helped them and a grief support group would be helpful in the church. Even though several females had not experienced a significant loss in the last three years, they too felt a grief support group should be available in the church. Only one female that was surveyed felt a grief group should not be available and would not be helpful in the church. There were eight females who suffered the loss of a loved one but did not have a grief support group to attend. Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 illustrate the percentages comparing males' to females' responses to each of the five questions on the survey listed in Appendix B.

Of the 17 males who completed the surveys, only one felt a grief support group should not be available and would not be helpful in the church. Four males had suffered a significant loss within the last three years and three had attended a support group. The majority of respondents completing the survey were over 55 years of age in both female and male categories.

During the periods when some of the respondents suffered a significant loss there was a grief support ministry available in the church. During that time, there were two support ministries available to attend but only 36% of those surveyed who had suffered loss sought support in the healing process by attending one of these groups. Each group had certified caregivers who were qualified to facilitate grief support.

One of the grief support ministries, Grief Recovery, survived for two groups that met once weekly for six weeks. One group started with six participants and after one session one person did not return to the group. The second group had four participants who attended the entire six weeks. The ministry was active for several months after the

two groups were completed but without any participation even though loss had occurred among members and members' families within the church.

The other support ministry, Formational Prayer Healing, was a 16-week structured group where participants met weekly to get help and healing from any losses that may cause life situations that usually develop into dysfunctional behaviors.

Research has discovered that in the last three years there have been only two groups with six participants in one group and five participants in the second group. Only one member from New Canaan Worship Center participated in the first group. Again, research revealed that there were members who had not only lost loved ones but had losses from health issues, financial issues, separations, and "empty nest syndrome" (children leaving home). However, the choice of utilizing the support ministry was not taken advantage of.³

The survey results confirmed that even though people suffer significant losses they are reluctant to attend grief support groups. This was true for males and females; however, a greater percentage of females will attend support grief groups compared to males.

³ More information on Grief Support Ministries is found in Chapter One, "The Problem and the Setting."

Table 3. Question 1 - Comparison between Male and Female

Age	Male	Female
18 – 25	9%	0%
26 – 35	0%	3%
36 – 45	0%	12%
46 – 55	0%	6%
Over 55	27%	48%

Table 4. Question 2 - Comparison between Male and Female

Age	Male	Female
18 – 25	9%	0%
26 – 35	0%	3%
36 – 45	0%	15%
46 – 55	18%	3%
Over 55	55%	33%

Table 5. Question 3 - Comparison between Male and Female

Age	Male	Female
18 – 25	0%	0%
26 – 35	0%	0%
36 – 45	0%	3%
46 – 55	9%	3%
Over 55	9%	33%

Table 6. Question 4 - Comparison between Male and Female

Age	Male	Female
18 – 25	9%	0%
26 – 35	0%	3%
36 – 45	0%	9%
46 – 55	18%	6%
Over 55	55%	70%

Table 7. Questions 5 & 6 - Data Results from Respondents

Gender & Age	No Response	Yes, Response	Grand Totals
<i>Female</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>33</i>
18 – 25	0	0	0
26 – 35	1	1	2
36 – 45	1	4	5
46 – 55	0	2	2
Over 55	8	16	24
<i>Male</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>11</i>
18 – 25	0	1	1
26 – 35	0	0	0
36 – 45	0	0	0
46 – 55	2	0	2
Over 55	5	3	8
Grand Totals	17	27	44

The second research method used in this thesis-project was a survey questionnaire form which was sent to 25 small to mid-sized churches in the Southside area of Richmond, VA. The required consent form, survey questions, and a self-stamped envelope were sent to randomly selected churches. The selected churches were given a date to have the survey form returned. There were more obstacles encountered in getting the surveys returned from the selected churches compared to surveys from participants in the researcher's faith community. Only four surveys were returned by the requested date. Two letters were returned because of insufficient addresses, four

churches were sent an e-mail requesting the completed forms to be returned, 13 churches were reached by telephone, and two churches were left messages on answering machines.

As illustrated in Survey 2,⁴ the questionnaire inquired whether the church had a grief support ministry and if the answer was “no” to provide a comment. Question 4 of the survey inquired if the church did not have a grief support ministry, had the church considered organizing such a ministry. According to the data results in Table 8, “Data Results from Churches,” responses revealed that four churches have grief ministries. However, in reading over the comments, two churches which answered “yes” to having a grief support ministry used their Missionary ministry to serve as the grief ministry in the church when there was a loss. Another response from one church who responded “yes” to having a grief support ministry used their deacons to minister to persons who had suffered losses. One of the churches who had a grief support ministry had named the ministry “HEAL” ministry which meant, “Help Everyone Adore Life.” This spoke volumes for that church who wanted all persons suffering from loss to be helped and support in the grief process to be healed in order to adore life again.

Figure 1 and Table 8 reveal that 20% of the churches that were sent surveys did not respond. There were 80% who did respond after the second request. Out of the 25 churches that were sent surveys, a total of 19 responded, one survey was returned because of an insufficient address, and five surveys, even with a second request, did not

⁴ See Appendix C.

respond. Along with Table 8, Graph 2, indicates the membership in the 19 churches that responded. The membership ranged from 60 to 400. However, there was not any evidence to know whether these numbers represented active members who attended worship service on a consistent basis. The churches that have grief support ministries represent 39% of the surveys responses and 61% of churches do not have grief support ministries.

According to the survey results, only two churches were considering organizing a grief support ministry and one of the two acknowledged that the support ministry will be Stephen Ministry. Most churches, because of the size of the church, revealed that the pastor or elders in the church ministered to those at the time of loss of their loved ones. Several churches revealed they used the diaconate to minister to persons who needed support at their time of loss. Usually weeks after the funeral the support would end unless the person suffering requested prayer or a visit.

Surveys from the 25 randomly selected churches in the Southside of Richmond, VA, revealed that significant losses occur among their members but a grief support ministry was not available to offer support. However, several churches use their existing organized ministries such as the diaconate, missionaries, elders, and pastors to minister to those in need of support. While this may be helpful, the survey comments did not reveal if these ministers had had any professional training in the area of support to be effective in supporting the persons who needed help.

For the researcher, one comment from a church that stated, “We have not identified a need for this ministry, we offer support as needed,” was quite perplexing.

Suffering from losses occur all the time, including death and dying, therefore, there is always a need. The results of the surveys from churches revealed that only a few had grief support ministries and even more noticeable was the responses that indicated that most churches were not considering organizing a ministry to support those who had suffered losses.

Seemingly, this indicated that there was a lack of knowledge of how important this ministry could be for those who are grieving. Certainly, condolences probably were extended to those suffering from losses and probably pastors and ministers had performed funeral and memorial services for their members and their families in their churches. However, it is important and necessary for a support ministry to be available as griever start the healing process. Many persons may choose not to take advantage of a grief support ministry but the same is true for many other ministries in the church but the ministries are available and so should grief support ministry.

Table 8. Data Survey Results from Churches

Church Name	Number of members	Is there a grief support ministry in your church?	If answer is "no," please comment	If there is no grief-support ministry, is organizing one being considered?
1	200	No	No	-
2	150	No	No	-
3	70	Yes	-	-
4	75	No	No	No
5	125	No	No	Pastor/two elders cover losses.
6	400	Yes	-	-
7	395	No	-	Have not identified a need. Offer support when needed.
8	90	No	No	
9	150	No	No	Missionary covers.
10	150	No	No	
11	50	No	Yes	Considering Stephen Ministry.
12	290	No	No	-
13	400	Yes	-	-
14	395	Yes	-	-
15	125	No	No	Diaconate support losses.
16	135	No	No	-
17	80	No	No	-
18	60	No	No	Pastor handles losses.
19	70	No	No	-
20	n/a	-	-	Return to sender.
21	n/a	-	-	No response
22	n/a	-	-	No response
23	n/a	-	-	No response
24	n/a	-	-	No response
25	n/a	-	-	No response

Figure 1. Questions 1 & 2

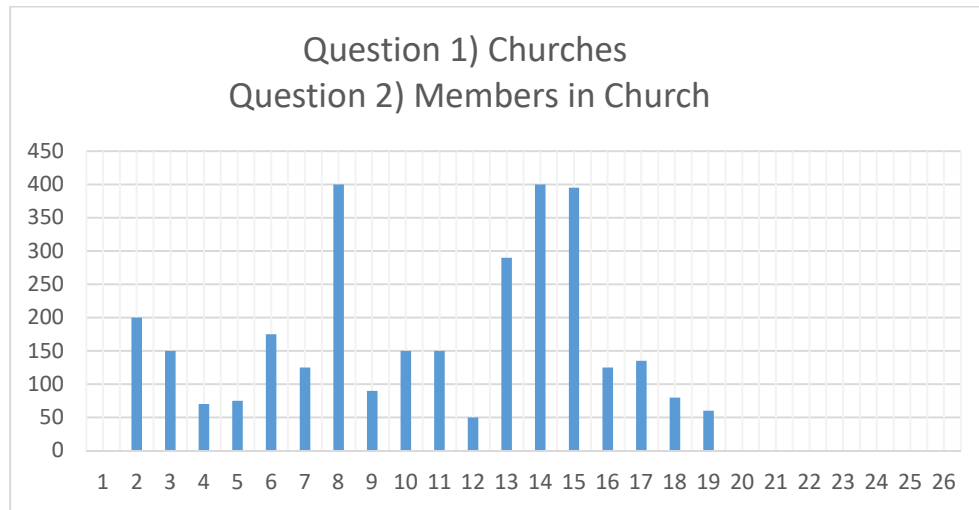
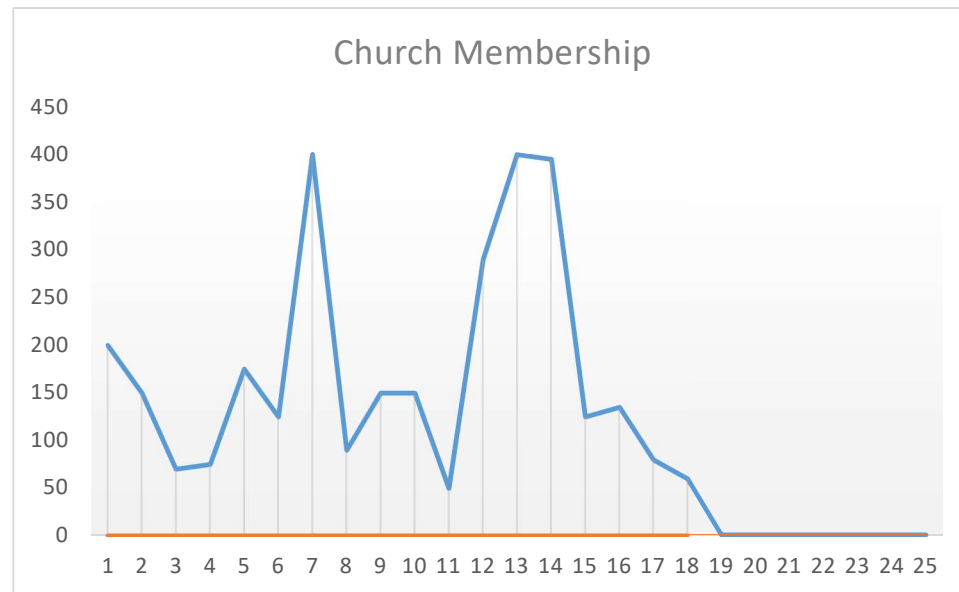


Figure 2. Church Membership



The third research method used in this thesis-project was to conduct interviews from selected participants from New Canaan Worship Center in the Southside of Richmond, VA. All participants had experienced significant losses within the last three years. Each participant was willing to be interviewed. The IRB consent form was explained to each participant and each was given a copy of the form to read before the

interview began. Especially important was to make sure the confidentiality section was understood as well as for participants to know that their name would not be used. I explained to participants that a number would be assigned to their interview.

Because of the sensitivity of the subject of grief, the interviews were not extended for a long period of time. The questions were thorough but not probing which allowed for participants to freely share as they felt the need to do so. This researcher was interested in a loss that was significant to the griever, the feelings that accompanied that loss, whether the griever utilized a grief support group or not, and how or what helped during the grief process. Each participant was selected from a different age group.

The interviews were conducted on September 18, October 24, and November 15, 2017. All were conducted in locations that were private and secured. Each person interviewed was asked if the environment presented a safe and secure feeling where they felt comfortable talking about their experience of death and dying of their loved ones.

Interview – Participant One

Interviewer: Thank you for participating in this interview. Are you comfortable talking about your loss?

Participant: I can talk and answer your questions. I am comfortable talking about my son's death.

Interviewer: *(realizing this interview may be extremely difficult for this person)*. At any time, you can stop the interview. Also, you can share as much as you like.

Participant: Okay.

Interviewer: I know of one significant loss within the last three years. Was there more than one?

Participant: No, just my son. He died about a year and a half ago.

Interviewer: I know this was tragic for you and your family, especially, the way he died.

Participant: Yes, he was shot and I believe he died on the street.

Interviewer: *(didn't pursue any more questions concerning the death)*. Your son lived in Norfolk, VA. How old was he?

Participant: He was 28-years-old when he was shot. He was shot in March. I was at work when I got the call but didn't know he had died. I was just told that he had been shot.

Interviewer: Would you like to stop the interview?

Participant: No, I am okay.

Interviewer: Who called you to tell you this news?

Participant: My daughter who lives with me here in Richmond, VA. One of her cousins in Norfolk, VA, called to tell her. My daughter didn't know that my oldest son and his wife, who live in Suffolk, VA, were on their way to get me.

(Norfolk and Suffolk are adjoining cities approximately 20 miles apart).

Interviewer: That was tragic and devastating. Can you talk about some of your feelings during that time of grieving?

Participant: When I got the call, I couldn't believe it. Of course, I was crying and in disbelief. Even when my oldest son and wife came for me, no one told me my son was dead, just that he had been shot. I remember just crying and screaming. But after I found out he had died, I wanted to die and I felt like I was going to die myself. I kept saying, "No, no, it didn't happen." I just couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: I am so sorry you had to experience that tragedy.

Participant: My employer was very good to me. They gave me a 30-day extended stay. It was without pay but I didn't care. I had leave to cover most of the 30 days. I needed that time because I was depressed and didn't want to do anything, especially work. I do private duty and couldn't take care of anyone during that time.

Interviewer: What did you do in those 30 days?

Participant: My son and his wife vacation in Florida every year, so I went with them to Florida for a week. I stayed in Norfolk for a while, about two weeks. I

wanted to spend time with my grandson and his mother. My grandson was two at the time.

Interviewer: How is your grandson and his mother?

Participant: He is growing and doing good, so is his mother. I keep in touch with them and visit them once in a while.

Interviewer: It has been about two years since the death. How are you doing?

Participant: I will always think about my son. Many times, I find myself sitting down and reflecting and find myself crying. But when I think I can't go on, I start praying, talking to God. You see, I know what Jesus did for me and because of what Jesus did, I am here now. I talk to God because I know what He went through when His Son died. So when things get heavy, I talk to God and know that He is the One who has helped me.

Interviewer: Did you ever attend a grief support group?

Participant: Yes, I did.

Interviewer: Did you find it helpful?

Participant: I did, but again, my help comes from God, praying and talking to Him.

Interview – Participant Two

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. You may give as much information as you are comfortable sharing.

Participant: I am glad to help you.

Interviewer: Have you experienced a significant loss within the last three years?

Participant: Um, um... let's see. I have had so many losses over the last three years. A lot of family members who died.

Interviewer: Which one was the most significant one?

Participant: Well, when I think about it, (*paused*) I have to say my Uncle "T". He was my father's brother, the only one of my father's siblings who was left. When he died about three years ago, I was so hurt, the death touched my heart a lot. I often went to Baltimore to visit him and would bring him here to Richmond to stay a few days with me, especially, during Thanksgiving holiday.

Interviewer: It sounds as if you and him were very close.

Participant: Yes, he was like a father to me. I made sure he was properly cared for and had what he needed. You know when I think about it, I had another person just a few months ago who was a significant person in my life that when she died, I was devastated.

Interviewer: May I ask who was that person?

Participant: Even though she wasn't blood, not a relative, she was very important to me. She was my cousin's wife but we were friends long before they knew

each other. We grew up like sisters, matter of fact, she stayed with my mother, in our house for a little while. No one knows the relationship between two people. Very few people knew how close we were. They knew we knew each other and some knew she was married to my cousin but didn't know the deep relationship we had.

Interviewer: Relationships do matter.

Participant: Yes, I know. She had been sick with cancer and seeing her deteriorate hurt my heart. I usually would visit her at least twice a week and would bring her food she could eat as the cancer progressed. Even when she couldn't stay at home any longer and was put in hospice, I went to the hospital every day and near the end, the last few days, I went twice a day. When I think about it, her death affected me much more because I am at the end of life, even though no one knows when they will die except God. But her death started me thinking more about my mortality. I loved my uncle and his death hurt me a whole lot. His health wasn't that good but I didn't know he was at that stage in life. He was 90 years old but his mind was good. He lived by himself but he had companion care. It was a shock when I got the call that he had passed. I had just seen Uncle "T" the weekend before he passed. I had gone to Baltimore to visit him.

Interviewer: Are these memories causing some unpleasant feelings?

Participant: No, I can continue. I do think about my uncle a lot but I know at that age he had lived a good, long life. But when I think of *(name)*, I grieved her

sickness, the refusal to take treatments, grieved her death but what bothered me the most was the fact that she was much younger than my uncle. My uncle was 91 years old when he died. Whereas my uncle had lived and accomplished many things, my friend had so much left unfinished, in my eyes. She had a husband, children, very young grandchildren, family, and her ministry. The church she planted was only a few years old and the ministry was growing.

Interviewer: It could be that even though she was young, she had accomplished the plan and purpose that God had for her on the earth.

Participant: I know that is true but knowing it did not make it hurt any less. I do believe she knew it as well, because when she found out the cancer had come back several places she did not want any kind of treatments. I didn't understand it at the time why she refused treatment telling me and others that, "I am going to eat healthy and I believe in holistic healing. I will be alright."

Interviewer: Sounds as if she had great faith.

Participant: She did and I realize she was saved. Because she was saved, we too, her loved ones, have an opportunity to see her again. You know, her daughter said to me, maybe about a month before her mother died, "'Auntie,'" she called me aunt even though I was not related to her but she knew the relationship between her mom and me. "I don't know what conversation God and my Mom had. But whatever He said, my mom

chose not to seek medical help.” But it still hurt, I didn’t want to see her go.

Interviewer: Could you name some of your other feelings as you went through the grief process?

Participant: I was very angry for several reasons, most of what I have already talked about. I was upset, sad, and very unhappy. Took a “moment” to get myself together. Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I was also frustrated.

Frustrated because after (*name’s*) death, I was grieving but most of my family members from North and South Carolina, as well as here in Richmond, were calling me to find out how her husband, children, and the church was doing as if I was in charge.

Interviewer: I imagine it was frustrating and you were grieving yourself. I guess they felt they could depend on you.

Participant: I know they do and I have to come to terms with the family calling on me for practically everything.

Interviewer: Have you come to terms with the family always calling on you?

Participant: Yeah, I figured out that. That is the reason God put me here on earth, to serve others, especially my family.

Interviewer: Have you started to heal from (*name’s*) death?

Participant: Yes, I started healing when I started to think about the fact that (*name*) was saved and I would see her again. It took a while to get to that place. I went on vacation that had been planned the very next day after (*name’s*)

funeral. I couldn't concentrate, couldn't get it together. All I could think about was her and her husband, my cousin.

Interviewer: Have you gone through any of the stages of grief that you can identify?

Participant: I went through the denial stage. I kept thinking and saying "it can't be" or either "this didn't happen." Especially I was in denial with Uncle "T" but even though it took a moment I came to the acceptance stage. I realized that is a part of life. And I just had to go on.

Interviewer: One last question, did you ever attend a grief support group or talk to a caregiver or counselor?

Participant: No, no, I didn't.

Interviewer: May I ask why not? At the time of (*name's*) death there was an active grief support group available in the church.

Participant: I never thought about going to a grief support group. I remember years ago a member of the church was found dead in a hotel. That person had a family who included a very young child. She lost her father and probably didn't understand him being missing from her life. I went to the pastor and said something should be in place in the church for that child and other children who have lost a loved one. But nothing happened, the support was left for the deacons.

Interviewer: I remember that family but there was a different pastor at the time of that tragic death.

Participant: Well, I thought it was the same pastor. I know I have gone to our pastor who is the leader now on something as similar and nothing was done at the time.

Interviewer: As you stated earlier, you have suffered a lot of losses. During that time there wasn't any support except from the pastor and deacons. However, in the last, at least, four years there have been several efforts to have grief support ministries in the church.

Participant: I know but I didn't participate for several reasons. A lot of us don't like to open up. (*sounding disgusted*) The reason for that is the fear that everything said in the group or one-on-one counseling will be put in the street, which means told to the congregation, intentionally or not.

Interviewer: If that happens, that would be so wrong.

Participant: Other reasons I didn't attend any grief group is because after I had gone through so many family deaths, I just felt it wouldn't do any good to attend a group. I could handle my own grief on my own. To engage in a group wouldn't do me any good. I also felt that the grief groups that were organized didn't have qualified people to lead the groups. Another reason I didn't attend any of the groups was because I felt the pastors were sort of bragging from the pulpit when they would say such things as "both of my parents are still living." "At my age most everyone in here have lost their parents, but we still have ours." Seems to me they had no sympathy or respect for others who had lost loved ones. To me, if you

have not walked in my shoes, you can't teach or guide me in the grief process.

Interviewer: You definitely have a right to your feelings. I have heard the same comments but I didn't take it as being prideful or bragging. If I recall, they always thanked God for their blessing of having their parents.

Participant: I still love them but, yes, that was the way I felt. But in the last year, they don't make those comments anymore after the death of one of their parents.

Interviewer: I appreciate this interview and your openness. Again, I am sorry for so many losses in your life.

I was closing the interview but the participant had more to share after the death of her mother which was approximately twenty years ago. She wanted to share, so I let her.

Participant: Let me tell you something that happened to me when my Mom passed. I know it was years ago but I will never forget. What I will tell you is the main reason I can go on when one of my relatives dies.

Interviewer: Okay, tell me, I am listening.

Participant: When my mom died, I grieved and grieved. I would cry and prayed to her each a.m. I could smell her everywhere and every time I heard her favorite song, I would burst out crying. Eight or nine months later after her death, seemingly, my spirit settled down somewhat. God spoke to me in a dream and that was the start of my healing over her death. I remember I had a dream about Mom. She was sitting in a beautiful

garden, full of all kinds of beautiful flowers. *(voice rising with excitement)*

Mom was facing God and whatever God was saying Mom was writing it down. As I watched, God spoke to me and said, "If you want to see her again, you better get yourself right." That dream touched me and I knew my mother was with God but more than that, I knew I had to make some changes in my life. I knew I was doing some things that were not pleasing to God. I began to make some changes and I try to do the right thing.

Even though it hurts and I grieve when my loved ones die, I keep going because I believe that I will see them again. And after a minute of grieving, I began the healing process.

Interviewer: Thank you, that is a beautiful picture of God and your mother surrounded by beautiful flowers. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Participant: No, I think that is all for right now. Thank you for listening.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing and thank you for being willing to be interviewed.

Interview – Participant 3

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to do this interview.

Participant: I wanted to help.

Interviewer: I am interviewing you for two separate questions. You can be as open as you would like and not pressured to share anything you are uncomfortable telling. Would that be okay?

Participant: I will answer both questions as best as I can.

Interviewer: The first question is, as a leader in the church, what is your opinion on the reason why grief support ministries are not used when they are organized or even survive in New Canaan?

Participant: I have several opinions and I really feel that some are not opinions but facts.

Interviewer: You have had firsthand experience with starting a grief group so you could be certified as a facilitator/counselor in the grief recovery program.

Participant: I did start that program and two other persons went through the same intense training and they were certified as well. After we were certified, we advertised that grief counseling was available at the church. No one was interested. Then we decided to have one day a month to meet with those who needed help. So we advertised that counselors would be available every first Monday of each month and persons did not need an appointment but just to come to the church. We were also trained in doing one-on-one counseling. Again, no one showed up. After a few

months the three of us just stopped coming to the church on Monday nights waiting for persons to come.

Interviewer: There have been several deaths in the families of the members of New Canaan, along with separations and at least one divorce that we know of. Yet members are not embracing the help that is offered. What are your thoughts?

Participant: I believe it is the culture, environment, and trust. Because of the culture, African Americans, they were taught to depend on self or their families. They believe they are strong enough to handle anything on their own.

Interviewer: What do you mean by their environment?

Participant: By environment I mean the church. A lot of people do not feel the church is a place to “spill” everything they are feeling, their true feelings. I believe trust is a fact not an opinion. African Americans have a trust issue, some is because of the culture and the other reason is the fact they have been betrayed before, so it is difficult to trust people enough to share their feelings. There are those in the church who feel grief support groups are not practical. There is a lack of training for small group leaders, which would include a breakdown on how to conduct the group, lack of emotion for the people in the group, and lack of empathy and how to be authentic. And leaders are not relational.

Interviewer: I believe there is much truth in what you are saying.

Participant: And too, there are different contexts of relationship with a deceased person. Sometimes there is guilt, what should have been said but wasn't said, unspoken thoughts, and words. In a group, persons suffering don't want to say those things. They don't want to share shattered hopes, broken dreams, lost hope, and shame. They may feel if they shared these things others in the group would look at them with contempt, look at them strange or odd, and probably think they seem "crazy."

Interviewer: Thank you for your input. As a leader who has organized support groups, participated in groups, and saw many support groups dissolve, I appreciate everything you have said. Is there anything else you want to share?

Participant: I think education plays a part in a reason why some groups don't survive.

Interviewer: What do you mean by education?

Participant: I believe grievors who may come to the support groups ready to share and intend to be consistent in coming. Once they learn the facilitator has a higher education, more knowledge, and discipline than them, it may cause persons to be somewhat intimidated and stop coming.

Interviewer: Thank you again for your thoughts. The second question I would like for you to share as much as you are able to about the significant loss you experienced over the last three years.

Participant: Actually, I suffered several losses. Which one do you want to know about? I suffered through a divorce, the death of my uncle's wife--my

mom's brother's wife, the death of my mom a few months ago, and the death of my uncle--my dad's only brother.

Interviewer: That's quite a list of losses. I would like for you to talk about any or all of them.

Participant: I was sorry that my uncle's wife had died but I know it was painful for my uncle. I was closer to my uncle—my dad's brother because at one time he lived with us. I felt sad and hurt but Uncle Jack (*not real name*) was in a nursing home, constantly body breaking down and in pain, so I looked at his death as a relief for him. I hurt for my dad because it was just the two of them and my grandmother, their mom, who had been dead for many years. (*participant stopped talking for a moment*)

Interviewer: I am sorry for all your losses. Do you want to talk about your feelings for the other two losses you named?

Participant: Okay, my separation and divorce. I had been married for 25 years and, of course, it hurt when we separated. We have only been divorced for two years and I did grieve but I knew it was for the best. Things weren't getting any better even after the separation. We are finally friends and sometimes we go out to dinner but getting married again. Oh, no! We talked about it but no, I am not doing that again. When he got sick, I was right there and as I told him, "I will always take care of you even when you are sick."

Interviewer: Are you okay? Do you want to talk about your mother? Your feelings and the effect the losses had on you physically, mentally, emotionally, or psychologically?

Participant: Seems as if you are skeptical, a little skirmish about asking me questions about her death.

Interviewer: No, I am trying to be sensitive to your feelings.

Participant: I am okay now. I can talk about her death. It was a sudden death. I couldn't believe it at first. I lost it at the hospital—screaming and crying and was told I blanked out for a moment but I don't remember.

Interviewer: Had your mother been sick?

Participant: Not really. We were taking her back and forth to the doctor, she was having slight loss of memory, erratic behavior, and the doctors thought she had the start of dementia so he put her on medication. But even with that diagnosis she was not bedridden and the siblings and I started spending a lot of time with her. Eventually, we decided to get a companion to come each day because we noticed she was losing weight and found out she was not eating properly or some days not eating at all. Of course, this did not go over well at first with mom. She told us she could take care of herself. But she listened to me and trusted me.

Interviewer: You told me the day she died, you "lost" it at the hospital. According to you, it was traumatic. Suffering from grief is hard and everyone grieves

differently. What were some of your feelings as you went through the grieving process?

Participant: First I was in disbelief. I was on vacation in Panama and one of my sisters called. I think it was Wednesday. *(paused, thinking)* Yes, it was Wednesday. She said mama wasn't eating. I asked her when did that start. I had visited her before I left that prior Saturday and she wasn't eating a whole lot but I had coached her into eating some food. My sister said mom had told her siblings, every time they tried to get her to eat, she would tell them she wasn't hungry. My sister told me my mother had been in bed all that week and didn't want to get up. Every time she tried, she would get dizzy and would lie back down. I wanted to know why they didn't get her to the hospital and my sister said they asked her to go the hospital. Mom said she wasn't going. *(paused)* You have to know my mother, what she said goes, she was pretty stubborn. I told my sister, "Well, when I get back, if she is not better, she is going to the hospital." I also knew once I got home she would eat for me. One thing was true, my mother trusted me and knew I would look after her. I could get her to do things my siblings couldn't get her to do.

Interviewer: I understood you to say you told your sister that once you got home your mom would eat for you, that she trusted you, and she knew you would look after her. Did I hear you correctly?

Participant: Yes, that's what I said. I could get her to do some things the others couldn't.

Interviewer: Because she did trust you, looking back over the events that happened, did you later feel guilty because you were not home to get her to eat or get her to the hospital?

Participant: No, I didn't! In no way did I feel guilty. Let me see. *(paused, seemingly thinking)* I got home late Saturday night or rather early Sunday morning. Went to church and when I left church, I went straight to my mother's house. I was surprised because she seemed, in just a few days, to have lost weight. She was in bed when I got there. One of my brothers and both sisters came in right from church. I told Mom I would fix her some food and she said she wasn't hungry. She was talking. But I knew something was wrong. I told her you are going to the hospital today. She said okay. I told her as soon as I go to pick up my puppy from where I had boarded her, I would come right back and she was going to the hospital today. I had gone maybe two streets away when my brother called and said they had called an ambulance to take mom to the hospital and afterwards I picked up the puppy to meet them at Chippenham Hospital. My brother said she was still talking when they put her in the ambulance. By the time I picked up the puppy and took her home it was maybe less than an hour. When I got to the hospital and my family said she had coded twice and the last time they couldn't bring her back. I remember

screaming, crying, and running. I couldn't believe it! I had just talked to her!

Interviewer: I am sorry you and your family had to experience that trauma. We can stop this interview if you like.

Participant: No, I am fine. *(continuing again)* I truly believe my mother was waiting until I got home to go to the hospital. I also believe she was just waiting to see me before she died. She trusted me and knew I would take care of her. Since she had started having issues, she began to depend on me, seemingly more than the others. Because of her moods, there were some difficult times with her but the medication the doctor had put her on had helped a lot in the last few months.

Interviewer: It has been maybe a year and a half. Do you think you have gone through the stages of grief yet? Even though the stages can be repeated.

Participant: I have experienced some. Of course, I was in denial. I couldn't believe it! I was very angry but I don't think I ever bargained with God. I know I was in what seemed like a fog for a long time. At one point, I was so devastated, I wasn't sure I wanted to continue with my profession, goals, or anything else. I just wanted to sleep, be by myself, and not have to engage in anything. I was depressed. One day my friend from Maryland called and said I am coming down to get you and bring you up to Maryland to be with me and my family. When I got there she kept us constantly on the go. After a few days in Maryland we went to New York

to shop and see a play. Getting away helped a little but I missed my mom.

Interviewer: Did you seek help by attending a grief support group or get individual counseling?

Participant: No, I didn't.

Interviewer: May I ask why?

Participant: Well, I didn't attend a grief group because I knew how to process grief. I sat down one day and processed my own grief. In addition, I do have a mentor, and I did talk to her about some of the things I was going through.

Interviewer: Yes, I know you are a caregiver and I know you have been certified as a facilitator of grief recovery and can lead grief groups as well as counsel persons.

Participant: In processing my grief, I realized that I had gone through cycles of grief with my mother before she passed. Over the years it was a continuing cycle. *(drawing a circle in the air)* One cycle was anger that I went through. I was angry because of personal things she had said to me, personal things that had gone on. Some of those things penetrated in deep places within me. As soon as one cycle was over, another would soon begin because of what she would say about dad. Grieved because of our lost relationship. My mom used lots of accusations and was constantly cynical.

Interviewer: Did some of these things happen because of her medical condition?

Participant: Some of her mood swings may have resulted from her condition but I really believe mom had some psychological problems and they all stemmed from her childhood. And as I sat and processed my grief, the revelation came to me that Mom just wanted to be affirmed. No one had ever told her, I know I had not. She wanted someone to tell her she had done a great job, especially raising five kids. As I sat there, I didn't know what to do or say. As I sat meditating and processing, I was led to tell her in the spirit. So I really lamented to my mother as I sat there. After that I began to heal. Still miss my mom. It still hurts that she had wanted something that meant so much to her and she didn't get it before she died. However, even with going through cycles of grief before her death and grieving after she passed, I am thankful that she had turned to me and trusted me to take care of her even though over the last few years there had been some rocky times. These times weren't just isolated to me but to dad and all the siblings.

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Thank you even more for being open and honest in your responses. Is there anything else you would like to share before we close this interview?

Participant: No, there is nothing else but if you need more information, I am glad to help.

Interviewer: I think I have enough information. Thank you again. Goodbye.

The three persons who were interviewed suffered loss of important persons in their lives. Each one shared how they began the healing process.

Participant One had the shortest interview because the researcher was careful not to prolong the interview because of the possibility of renewing some deep wounds that may not have completely healed. It was a tragedy to have had your child shot and left for dead on the streets. The participant shared she did attend a grief support group. She acknowledged that it helped her. However, she shared that talking and praying to God is what helped her as she grieved. She revealed that in the present time when she feels overwhelmed with thoughts of her son, she finds relief in praying to God because she remembers what He had done for her.

Participant Two suffered several losses and chose two that were significant and were more effective than others. One death was a relative but the other was a close friend which clarifies that every loss should be grieved. There were several reasons why grief support groups were not utilized by this participant. There was a trust factor, not only with the facilitator's qualifications, but with confidentiality within the group as well. This participant believed strongly that healing began because of hope. That hope was based on seeing their loved one again.

Participant Three suffered a tremendous unexpected loss. Of course, the death was devastating but the participant shared that she had gone through the cycle of grief over and over because of her mother's behavior and mental state. This researcher sensed this participant felt that there was more that she could have done but didn't do for her mother. However, she did not join a grief support ministry or seek counseling

because she processed her own grief. She shared that her healing took place by lamenting her loss. She is a certified grief recovery caregiver and used this process to heal her grief. Lamenting was an important step in this process.

This researcher did take note that two of the participants commented that trust in God and His power during the healing process sustained them.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROJECT OUTCOMES

After completing the research for this thesis-project, “The Obstacles or Gaps within African-American Churches toward Grief Support Groups,” the outcomes revealed that the hypothesis has been validated. Several theories that were proposed as reasons for obstacles or gaps in the African-American churches were confirmed as truths after completion of the research. The questionnaires from random individuals in the researcher’s faith community and the questionnaires from randomly selected churches in the Southside area of Richmond, VA, confirmed that there are obstacles in the form of attitudes that have led to a lack of involvement in such ministries in small and mid-sized churches toward grief support ministries. In addition, the three interviews that were conducted by the researcher helped to confirm these theories.

When a loss occurs, every loss should be grieved regardless of the loss. Loss of any kind means a separation. This may leave a void in a person’s life because the attachment to things or persons has been severed. Especially devastating is the loss that occurs from the death of a loved one. Since love is a powerful force, the loss can leave an enormous void that impacts every aspect of a person’s being.

Grief is defined as an emotional response to loss that can be expressed in a wide range of emotions.¹ Losing a loved one usually produces intense grief that can manifest

¹ Mayo Clinic, “What is Grief?”, accessed March 8, 2018, [mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief](https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief).

into a myriad of symptoms. Therefore, it is important that support be available for the griever. Usually that support will be provided by family and friends, but the support from the faith community is also necessary and helpful.

However, the questionnaire conducted with 25 randomly selected small and mid-sized African-American churches in the Southside area revealed that none of the churches had a grief support ministry. There were four responders who answered “yes” to the question, “Do you have a grief support ministry in your church”? Upon further research, it was discovered that those four considered the diaconate, missionaries, or the pastor as the grief support ministry. The findings were as follows from the 18 churches which responded: only one church used the missionary ministry, only one church used the diaconate ministry, and two churches used the pastors.

One of the two churches that had 60 members indicated that the pastor ministered to grieving persons. He commented that with so few members he could “cover” the losses. The other church where the pastor served as the support for grieving persons was assisted by two elders of the church.

Only one of 18 churches who responded to the survey indicated consideration was given to starting a Stephen Ministry, a support ministry for hurting, grieving persons and their families. While this was good, upon further research it was determined that this ministry had been discussed several years prior but had never been implemented. Speaking with pastors and leaders in some of these churches who completed the questionnaire, it became evident that they had genuine care and concern for the members and their families who had suffered a significant loss. They supported grieving

persons with prayers and visitations. For some persons, there was support in helping with the funeral service. Usually the support lasted for several weeks after the service but as the person began the grieving process, they were left to go it alone. Sometimes an occasional prayer was offered to the person who was suffering as the days and weeks passed. For most of the churches, however, that was the extent of the support from the faith community.

The outcome of this thesis-project was that randomly selected small and midsized churches in the Southside area of Richmond, VA, did not have grief support ministries and all except one had not considered organizing such a ministry in their churches. This researcher's evaluation of the data further revealed that there is a lack of information on the importance of having such a ministry as well as the devastating nature of grief. Grief is a process that can affect a person's physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

In addition, the data collected from the member's questionnaires of New Canaan Worship Center showed that even after suffering a significant loss, members did not take advantage of services offered from grief support groups that were organized and active during the time of their loss. A grief recovery group was active for two 8-week sessions with very low participation that consisted of five persons in one group and six persons in the second group. After the sessions were completed, two certified counselors were available for individual counseling sessions but no one took advantage of the free service. The grief recovery group fizzled and was not advertised after the second group for lack of participation.

It was interesting that the research further revealed that of the participants who took part in completing the questionnaires, 29 of 44 persons had suffered a significant loss. Of those 29 persons, 57% of the total (39% females, 18% males) found that grief support ministries would be helpful. Yet 40 of 44 persons surveyed (88% females, 82% males) felt grief support group ministries should be in churches. Only one person felt a grief support ministry should not be in the church and three persons did not respond to the question. The results from the data seemed to indicate that the respondents who had suffered losses felt that a grief support ministry would be beneficial for others but not necessarily beneficial for them as indicated by those who had attended a grief support group.

Several theories which may cause obstacles or gaps in African-American churches with grief support groups were confirmed by data received from three members interviewed from New Canaan Worship Center as well as other members who had experienced loss of loved ones.

All three interviews confirmed that trust and spirituality played a large part in their healing process². While no one can fully understand the nature and extent of a griever's feelings, we must learn to look with compassion and patience upon others' grief even if they do not share those feelings with us. Hence, a lack of compassion and care were reasons for not attending a grief support group.

² See Interviews, 124 – 135.

Other data collected from one of the interviews confirmed the theory that some persons believe that grief support groups did not provide a place of security for griever to express themselves, even within a group of persons who were on the road to healing. A lack of trust and confidentiality in some grief support groups caused more pain and anxiety for persons who had openly shared their feelings, usually to a group of strangers. Because of the lack of security and privacy, some persons preferred not to attend small grief groups. For one participant, the interview confirmed that the bias against small groups was influenced by other trust issues that had occurred in the church.

In addition, small grief group facilitators were one of the reasons for the disconnecting from the group. Data confirmed that in some cases the facilitators were not comforting and caring. They did not show the compassion that was expected by the grieving person. There were assumptions from those interviewed that facilitators were not knowledgeable enough with grief to conduct support groups. Or because of their education they, possibly, would not relate to the group because the facilitators felt they were more educated and more knowledgeable than those in the group. Another observation from a griever was, "If you have not walked in my shoes, what can you teach me?"

The data seems to indicate that African-American culture impacted how African – Americans grieved and the process they used to heal. Those cultural practices are called

“African survivals”³ in areas of spirituality and mourning. They mask feelings as a means of self-protection and avoid exposing their true moods. One such person had suffered many losses in the last three years including an aunt, two uncles, several cousins, and some friends. But when assistance was offered from the grief support group, she opted not to attend. Her reasoning was that “I will be alright” and “I am okay.” The other explanation was “I have to be strong for my family.” Some in the African-American culture refuse to impose their pain and anxiety on loved ones but especially will not allow those they consider “outsiders” to share in their grief.

Also, the data that was evaluated revealed that God and spirituality were reasons for the lack of participation in grief support groups. One participant who did attend a grief group explained that she relied on prayer and trust in God to heal her sorrow. Even when grief overwhelms her now, a year later after the death of her loved one, she continues to look to God for help. “In these times,” she reported, “I just talk to God. I know what He has done for me.” In Psalm 46:1 the promise is that “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Not only depending on God to carry them through the grief process and the grieving person’s spirituality as reasons for not attending grief support groups, some grieving persons believed there was life after death. They believed that they would see their loved ones again after the second coming of Jesus. They held on to the blessed hope that because of their salvation and living a righteous life they would be reunited

³ N. Lynne Westfield, *Dear Sisters, A womanist Practice in Hospitality* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001) 6-7, 15 -17.

with their loved ones again. Therefore, they believed that going through the grief process was something to endure for the greater good of seeing their loved ones. The researcher's evaluation of this attitude was that this was an avoidance mechanism.

After careful analysis of the research outcomes, this researcher's evaluation was validated that small and mid-sized churches need grief support ministries in their churches. Loss occurs all the time and some losses include death. Death results in grieving and grieving causes many emotions that can affect persons in many ways. Because of those emotions associated with grief, support is helpful and necessary. As a result of this research, recommendations were made to the pastors of New Canaan Worship Center to have an active, ongoing grief support ministry in the church. Previously, when the support ministry did not have any participation it was disbanded. While there are some who may not take advantage of the ministry, there may be others who will. Suggestions are to have ongoing advertising of the ministry in Sunday's bulletins, permanent posting in the announcements on the church's website, and including the group's contacts in the PowerPoint presentation during Sunday morning worship services and Wednesday night Bible study.

The recommendation to continue the Healing Care ministry would be ongoing regardless of the participation. This support ministry would be available to those who want to take advantage of the services offered. The ministry will be available for groups as well as individual counseling services. Caregivers who facilitate the groups will be required to go through intense training that includes structured lessons, faith experientials, and knowledge sharing. After training, the caregivers would be certified to

lead the Healing Care support groups, either sixteen or twelve weeks sessions. Each group will include at least four to six persons. Each group's emphasis will be healing by the Holy Spirit, not by the caregiver.

In addition to this recommendation, three qualified grief counselors will be asked to be available for individual counseling if grieving persons choose to have professional one-on-one counseling sessions instead of attending group sessions. This researcher believes that the name, "Healing Care" would be more attractive to grieving persons than a grief support group ministry. Most people want to know that someone cares, and most people want to be cared for. There should be ongoing training for caregivers, facilitators, and counselors. Research on the participation of the Healing Care ministry should be done at least quarterly to monitor members' attendance, the internal processes, and participant results, whether they be positive or negative.

The pastors expressed that they would support the ministry by advertising, keeping attention on small groups by giving reminders from the pulpit and to help the caregivers by reaching out to those persons/families who have suffered a loss to recommend and encourage them to attend a grief small group or at least talk to one of the certified caregivers.

While we can't change the mindset of any person on their attitudes concerning attending small support groups, it was decided to improve on the group environment by changing the location. The pastors agreed with the suggestion to conduct Healing Care groups and individual counseling session at New Canaan Worship Center's children and youth building which is not attached to the main sanctuary. This could provide

privacy from other events and activities at the main sanctuary. It could, also, aide in the confidentiality of the group settings.

Surveys will be provided for those who voluntarily want to comment on the group, its setting, the facilitator and any improvements in the process that could possibly be made. Names will not be required on the surveys.

After the data from the surveys had been complied and shared with the pastors, it was agreed that the Ministerial team could be more intentional in monitoring and reaching out to those who are grieving and suffering from known losses. Since one of the goals of New Canaan Worship Center is to be a “reaching” and a “mending” church, the ministry team, especially, those trained to be caregivers and counselors, could put forth more efforts toward grieving persons and their families. Some of the possibilities could mean supporting and walking along beside them as they go through the grief process. In doing so, exercise care not to invade a person’s privacy, and avoid overwhelming but letting those who are hurting know that they are loved and cared for by the leaders in the church. This could mean telephone calls, greeting cards or short visits. Possibly, this encouragement, care, and compassion could lead to grieving persons participating in a support group.

Support groups are needed in small and mid-size churches; therefore, this researcher will be intentional on exploring ideas on how to get the congregation involved in support group ministry.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: The Obstacles or Gaps Within the African-American Culture Toward Grief Support Ministries.

Principal Investigator: Blanche E. Murphy, Doctor of Ministry Program.

PURPOSE

This is a research study. The purpose of this research study is to find possible reasons why small and mid-sized African-American churches do not have loss support ministries, especially grief ministries. There is a disconnect within most of the African-American culture to participate in grief support ministries even when they are organized in small and mid-sized churches. This research will seek to discover the reasons for the lack of participation in grief support ministries and indicate ways that churches could facilitate participation. This is a much-needed ministry because there is loss occurring daily.

The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to decide whether to participate in the study or not. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear.

We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are a member of a small or mid-sized African-American church. In addition, you have suffered a loss recently and the information you can offer is valuable to this research.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate, your involvement will last for approximately 30 minutes.

There will be between five and ten questions concerning your participation or lack thereof in grief support ministries. These questions will seek to determine whether your present faith community has a grief support ministry.

Your answers will be confidential and kept in a secured place.

RISKS

I do not foresee any risks involved in completing this survey. All information you submit will have no identifiers.

BENEFITS

The potential benefit by participating in this study is the possibility that a grief support ministry may be organized if your present faith community does not have one. The results could benefit African-American churches that have grief support ministries to determine the reasons for lack of participation from members who have suffered loss. The entire church body could benefit from this study.

COMPENSATION

You will not be compensated in any form for participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of participation in this research project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. The only person who will have access to the responses will be Rev. Blanche E. Murphy. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to take part, or if you stop participating at any time, your decision will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. If you decide to withdraw from participation before completing this questionnaire, you will not be included in this study.

QUESTIONS

Questions are encouraged. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact Rev. Blanche E. Murphy, telephone number (804) 226-1855, email blanchemu@aol.com. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Institutional Review Board, David A. Currie, dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu, (978) 646-4176.

APPENDIX B

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP SURVEY TO PARTICIPANTS

1. Have you suffered a significant loss within the last three years?
Yes No
2. Was there a grief support ministry available for you to attend at your church?
Yes No
3. If you have ever attended a grief group, did you find it helpful in the healing process?
Yes No
4. If a grief support ministry was not available at your church, do you think one would be helpful?
Yes No
5. What is your gender?
Male Female
6. What is your age?
Between 18 -25
 26 -35
 36-45
 46-55
 Over 55

APPENDIX C

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP SURVEY TO CHURCHES

1. What is the name of your church?

2. How many members are there in your church?

3. Is there a grief support ministry in the church?

4. If the answer is no, please comment.

5. If there is not a grief support ministry in the church, has consideration ever been given to organizing one?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allender, Dan B., and Tremper Longman, III. *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions about God* (Colorado Spring, CO: Navpress, 1994), quoted in Bill Muehlenberg, "The Lament Psalms," *Culture Watch*, last modified February 2, 2012, accessed March 10, 2018, billmuehlenberg.com/2012/02/02/the-lament-psalms/.
- Anderson, Francis I. *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1981.
- Andrew, George Reid. *Afro-Latin American, 1800 - 2000*. New York, NY: Oxford, 2004.
- Atkinson, David J. *The Message of Job, Suffering and Grace*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991.
- Baldwin, Joyce. *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2008.
- Bergen, Robert D. *The New American Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996.
- Berlin, Adele. *Lamentations Commentary*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Bilezikiaan, Gilbert. *Why Small Groups*. April 2012. smallgroup.com/article/2012/why_small_groups.html (accessed April 2017).
- Blassingame, John W. *The Slave Community: Plantation life in the Antebellum South*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Blue Letter Bible (US), "Word Study, Greek and Hebrew." Accessed March 21, 2018, blueletterbible.org/search/search.cfm, criteria=grief & t=NIVHS=s-lexicon.Bible, New Revised Standard. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. New York, NY, 2001.
- Britannica Dictionary*. n.d.
- Carson, D. A. *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.
- Christian Doctrine*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.
- Churn, Arlene. *The End Is Just the Beginning: Lessons in Grieving for the African-American*. New York, NY: Harlem Moon Broadway Books, 2003.
- Collins, William. *Webster's New School and Office Dictionary*. New York, NY: Fawcett Crest, 1974.

- Coogan, Michael D. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Craige, Peter, Page Kelly, and Joel Drinkard, Jr. *Jeremiah World Biblical Commentary*. Waco, TX: World Books, Publishers, 2000.
- Dearman, J. Andrew. *The NIV Application Commentary-Jeremiah, Lamentations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Dobson, James. *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1993.
- Doehring, Carrie. *The Practice of Pastoral Care*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.
- Doka, Kenneth J. *Grief Is a Journey, Finding Your Path through Loss*. New York, NY: Altria Books, 2016.
- Dresser, Norine, and Fred Wasserman. *Saying Goodbye to Someone You Love: Your Emotional Journey Through End of Life and Grief*. New York, NY: Hamilton Printing Co., 2010.
- Foster, Richard J. *Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins House, 1992.
- France, R. T. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Gospel of Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007.
- Garland, David E. *The New American Commentary—2 Corinthians*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1999.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1976.
- Giddens, Sandra. *Coping with Grieving and Loss*. New York, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2000.
- Guzlk, David. *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*. Leicester, UK: Inter Varsity Press, 1988.
- Haugh, Kenneth C. *The Quest for Quality Caring*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990.
- . *Experiencing Grief, Journeying through Grief*. St. Louis, MO: Stephens Ministries, 2004.
- . *Finding Hope and Healing, Journeying through Grief*. St. Louis, MO, 2004.
- . *Rebuilding and Remembering*. St. Louis, MO: Stephen Ministries, 2004.

- . *A Time To Grieve, Journeying through Grief*. St. Louis, MO: Stephen Ministries, 2004.
- . *Christian Caregiving, A Way of Life*. St. Louis, MO: Augsburg Publishing House, 2012.
- Haugh, Kenneth C., and Koch, Ruth N. *Speaking the Truth in Love*. St Louis, MO, 1992.
- Herbert Lockyear, Sr. *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1986.
- Hillers, Delbert. *Lamentations Commentary*. New Havens, CT: Yale University Press, 1972.
- Horney, Karen. *Our Inner Conflicts*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.
- Hubbard, Robert L. *The Book of Ruth Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1988.
- Humphreys, Margaret. *Oranges and Sunshine*. London, UK: The Random House Group Ltd., 2011.
- James, John W., and Russell Friedman. *The Grief Recovery Handbook*. 20th anniversary edition. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2009.
- Jones, Kirk Bryon. *Rest in the Storm*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001.
- Kessler, David, and Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Grief and Grieving*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2005.
- Kings James Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson. Inc., 1999.
- Kübler-Ross, Elisabeth. *On Death and Dying*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1969.
- . *Death: The Final Days of Growth*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1975.
- Lea, Larry. *Could You Not Tarry One Hour?* Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 1987.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- MacDonald, William. *Believer's Bible Commentary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, Inc., 1995.
- McCarter, P. Kyle, Jr. *Anchor Yale Bible*. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishers Group, Inc., 1984.
- McKay, Claude. *Home to Harlem*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1928.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. n.d.

- Minnicks, Margaret, "The Movie 'Fences' with Denzel Washington and Viola Davis", Hubpages, last modified January 19, 2017. Accessed March 10, 2018, hubpages.com/entertainment/The-Movie-Fences-with-Denzel-Washington-and-the-Lessons-It-Teaches.
- Muehlenberg, Bill. "The Lament Psalms," *Culture Watch*, last modified February 2, 2012. Accessed March 10, 2018, <https://billmuehlenberg.com/2012/02/02/the-lament-psalms/>.
- Parry, Robin. *Lamentation: Two Horizons Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: 2010.
- Person, Gretchen. *Psalms for Healing, Praying with Those in Need*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001.
- Phillip, Sevin. "Thoughts to Consider to Help You through this Difficult Time: Dealing with Insensitivity." *Met Life Advice* (San Francisco, CA.: Research Publications, Inc., 2005). Vol. 11, Number 10.
- Phillips, Richard D. *Reformed Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel*. Philipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 2012.
- Raboteau, Albert. *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *The Book of Ruth Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.
- Rogers, Carl R. *On Becoming a Person*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.
- . *A Way of Being*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980.
- Rosenblatt, Paul C. and Beverly R. Wallace. *African American Grief*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005.
- Sanger, Jimmy, and Wales, "Larry." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 1/15/2001.
- Savage, John. *Listening & Caring Skills*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1996.
- Siler, R. Neal. *How I Got Over, Healing for The African American Soul*. Mechanicsville, UK: New Life Publishing, 2010.
- . *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey: Caring for the African American Soul*. Mechanicsville, UK: New Life Publishing, 2010.
- . *Healing for the Soul Devotional*. Mechanicsville, UK: New Life Publishing, 2013.
- Sorge, Bob. *Secrets of the Secret Place: Keys to Igniting Your Personal Time with God*. Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001.

- Stevenson-Moesrner, Jeanne, and Teresa Snorton. *Women Out of Order*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.
- Stein, Robert H. *Studying the Synoptic Gospels: Origin and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*. n.d.
- Tautges, Paul. *Comfort Those Who Grieve: Ministering God's Grace in Times of Loss*. Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2009.
- Walvoord, John F. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*. New Testament ed. Dallas, TX: Victor Books Publisher, 1985.
- Wardle, Terry. *Healing Care, Healing Prayer*. Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2001.
- . *Draw Near to the Fire*. Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2004.
- . *Wounded: How to Find Wholeness and Inner Healing in Christ*. Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2005.
- . *Identity Matters, Discovering Who You Are in Christ*. Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2017.
- Westfield, N. Lynne. *Dear Sisters: A Woman Practice of Hospitality*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2001.
- "What is Grief?" *Mayo Clinic*, 2017. Accessed April 13, 2018.
<https://www.mayoclinic.org/patient-visitor-guide/support-groups/what-is-grief>
- Wilson, Gerald. *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Witter, Connie. *P.S. God Loves You! Devotional*. Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 2001.
- Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003.

VITA

Blanche E. Murphy was born May 28, 1947 in the rural town of Yale, VA. She is the fourth child of Joseph and Nettie Jackson. She is a member of the New Canaan Worship Center, Richmond, VA. For the last ten years, she has been serving as an ordained elder chairing and assisting with several ministries.

She received her primary education in the public schools of Sussex County, VA. She attended J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Richmond, VA. She graduated from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA, with a Master of Divinity. She is also a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University earning a Master of Science in Patient Counseling degree. She has completed three years of the doctoral program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC. Her expected graduation date is May 2018.